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Reading the Medieval in the Modern:

The Living Tradition of Hagiography in the Vallabh Sect of Contemporary Gujarat

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Reading the Medieval in the Modern:

The Living Tradition of Hagiography in the Vallabh Sect of Contemporary Gujarat

by

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Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School
of The University of Texas at Austin
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements
for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Texas at Austin
May 2014

For Zoran.

Acknowledgements

This dissertation has been developed with the incredible patience, enthusiasm, support, and generosity of many people and institutions. The primary research for this project was conducted with the support of a Junior Fellowship (2011-2012) from the American Institute of Indian Studies. Writing was supported by a Graduate School Named Continuing Fellowship (2012-2013) from the University of Texas at Austin and a Dissertation Completion Fellowship (2013-2014) from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation/American Council of Learned Societies. I owe thanks to many of the American Institute of Indian Studies staff, both in Delhi and in Chicago, but especially to Purnima Mehta and Elise Auerbach, who were patient in providing support during research in India. In Austin, the administrators of the University of Texas' South Asia Institute and of the Department of Asian Studies—particularly Rachel Meyers and Jennifer Tipton—were helpful in facilitating various aspects of preliminary language study and funding and research in India.

I conducted research in several libraries and archives in India and the United States, including the University of Texas at Austin Libraries; the Vidya Vibhag Library in Kankroli, Rajasthan; the Pratham Peeth Archives in Kota, Rajasthan; the Gujarat Vidyapith Library in Ahmedabad, Gujarat; the Gujarat University Library in Ahmedabad; the Vallabh Sadan Library in Ahmedabad; the B.J. Institute of Higher Learning and Research in Ahmedabad; the L.D. Institute of Indology in Ahmedabad; and the Oriental Institute of Baroda in Baroda, Gujarat. I owe thanks to the staff at all of these institutions, but particularly to Dr. Ramji Savaliya at the B.J. Institute of Higher Learning and to

Adhikari Ashok Paliwal at the Vallabh Sadan. Gujarat University served as my institutional home in India and Dr. Intaj Malek supervised my work there. I would also like to thank Murtaza Gandhi, who patiently and enthusiastically helped me to transcribe and decipher many Gujarati materials. I am extremely grateful to Amit Ambalal who allowed me to use his personal library and who introduced me to many individuals in the *puṣṭimārgīy* community. Thanks also to Paulomi Shah, who will be designing a book that Amit and I are collaborating on and whose enthusiasm for my research is much appreciated.

I have shared portions of this research on panels at the American Anthropological Association Annual Meeting (2013); the Central Texas Colloquium on Religion (2012); the Madison South Asia Conference (2009, 2010, 2012 and 2013); and the Conference on Early Modern Literatures in India (2012). I received helpful responses and suggestions from the participants at each of these conferences. Rupert Snell, Tony K. Stewart, Thibaut d'Hubert, John Stratton Hawley, and Neelima Shukla-Bhatt served as chairs and respondents and provided valuable feedback.

I am overwhelmed by the hospitality that I have been shown during my studies in and research trips to India over the past several years. I owe very special thanks to Jitubhai and Surekhaben Shah for being like a second family to me and for always providing me with a safe and comfortable home in Ahmedabad. I thank Ashok, Ranjan, Avdesh, and Siddharth Paliwal for their generosity, care, and good humor. Sumit Sharma, who read the *vārtā*s with me every morning at the Vallabh Sadan in 2011-2012, reminded me that it did not matter how many times I thought I had read an episode, there was

always more to learn. I thank all of the men and women at the Goswami Haveli who invited me to observe the unique *sevā* there. I owe special thanks to Kailash and Krutika Bhatt and to Shashikhanth, without whom I would have laughed less and would certainly have arrived for *darśan* and other temple events at the wrong times. To all the men and women of the many *satsaṅg* groups that I visited weekly at temples and in private homes—I am extremely grateful for your patience and trust in me. I give special thanks to Hasmukhbhai, Kaushalbhai, Kishoriben, Nitaben, Bharatiyben, Manjulaben, Dipaben, Kumudben, Kailashben, Kashmiraben, Maheshvariben, and Dr. Yoginiben Mehta and her family. Thanks to Vrajeshkumar Maharaj's personal assistant, Lakshmilalji, to Rekhaben, and to many other *sevak*s for their hospitality during my stay in Kankroli, Rajasthan in March 2012. Thank you also to Dr. Rachna Tailang for sharing her intimate knowledge of her own family's history in Kankroli. Many members of the Vallabh Kul graciously assisted me with my research. I give special thanks to the following individuals: Vrajnath Maharaj, Tilak Goswami, Vrajbhamini Goswami, Abharan Goswami, and Vrajlata Betiji in Ahmedabad; Vrajeshkumar Maharaj and Vagish Goswami in Kankroli-Baroda; Pranay Goswami in Baroda; Goswami Indira Betiji in Baroda; Milan Goswami in Kota-Mumbai; and Goswami Anandbava in Rajkot. I am extremely grateful to Shyam Manohar Goswami in Mumbai for sharing his scholarship, time, and endless wisdom.

My colleagues and fellow graduate students at the University of Texas at Austin, Harvard Divinity School, and elsewhere have made this long journey both possible and enjoyable. I would like to acknowledge the following individuals for their intellectual companionship, friendship, and support during various stages of my graduate student

career: Sarah P. Taylor, Arun Brahmbhatt, Stella Dubish, Nell S. Hawley, Hamsa Stainton, Ishan Chakrabarti, Priya Nelson, Ellie Strand, Bhavya Tiwari, Jayita Sinha, Keely Sutton, Vibha Shetiya, Dean Accardi, Kayden Althen, Amy Hyne, Suzanne L. Shulz, Shital Sharma, Dinyar Patel, Isabel Huacuja Alonso, Richard Delacy, Nikola Rajić, Shruti Patel, and Kathryn Hardy.

I am grateful to many teachers and mentors—both in the United States and in India. I owe special thanks to Andy Rotman at Smith College, Ramu Pandit and Virendra Singh in Banaras, Meghna Bhatt and Nilotpala Gandhi in Ahmedabad, the late Shyamdas, Frederick Smith at the University of Iowa, John Stratton Hawley at Columbia University, Heidi Pauwels at the University of Washington, Parimal Patil, Diana Eck, Anne Monius, and Richard Wolf at Harvard University, and Gail Minault, Joel Brereton, Patrick Olivelle, Kamran Asdar Ali, Syed Akbar Hyder, and Oliver Freiberger at the University of Texas at Austin.

Rupert Snell and Kathryn Hansen have been ideal co-supervisors of this dissertation. They have both provided endlessly patient guidance, expert advice, and enthusiastic encouragement every step of the way. I am profoundly grateful for all they have shared with me during my time in Austin and can only hope that I will inspire and support my future students as they have inspired and supported me. My other committee members—Kathleen Stewart, Cynthia Talbot, and Martha Selby—have also been dedicated and inspiring teachers and mentors throughout my coursework, research, and writing. This is a dissertation about practices of reading, and each of these individuals has

taught me to read lovingly, critically, enthusiastically, inquisitively, carefully, and patiently in different and invaluable ways.

My family has given me vital support throughout the many years of graduate school. My parents, Judith and Richard Bachrach, have been tirelessly optimistic and encouraging of my academic endeavors and have always made sure that I have kept both feet on the ground. My sister Marion has been a model of perseverance, inspiring me to put all challenges into perspective. My mother-in-law and sister-in-law, Emina Stojaković and Zvezdana Stojaković, have helped make Austin Texas a true home. My husband Zoran has made this entire process not only possible, but also worth it. He has been ever patient and has pushed me to do my best and to stay sincere. He has also repeatedly reminded me that my work is lovable and that life away from the desk is even more lovable! Hvala ti Zorane na strpljenju, podršci, ljubavi i toleriranju vremena izgubljenog u pisanju. Ova disertacija je za tebe.

Reading the Medieval in the Modern: The Living Tradition of Hagiography in the Vallabh Sect of Contemporary Gujarat

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2014

Supervisors: Rupert Snell, Kathryn Hansen

This dissertation considers how and why a canon of medieval Hindi hagiography has continued to be significant for modern Gujarati devotees who follow the teachings of the sixteenth-century Hindu theologian Vallabhacharya. The texts in question, known as *vārtā*s, are based on oral hagiographies of Vallabhacharya, his descendants, and their early disciples, and provide sectarian history, theology, vicarious epiphany, and examples of devotional and social conduct. In modern contexts, however, devotees do not simply read the *vārtā*s to perpetuate didactic accounts of sectarian orthodoxy, but rather approach the narratives as negotiable grammars of tradition, which speak directly to modern, middle-class concerns. Based on archival and ethnographic research in urban Gujarat, the four chapters of this dissertation trace the various sites—including sectarian temples, private homes, courtrooms, print publications, and the Internet—in which the hagiographies have continued to be read and discussed. By considering hagiography ethnographically, this research shows how practices of individual and group reading, exegesis, and textual commentary allow for both the performance of devotion and critical negotiations between sectarian ideals inherited from the past and everyday life in the present. Drawing on theories of reading and narrative, performance, and lived religion,

this case study reveals the inherent diversity of sectarian discourse, even in scripturally specific settings.

This dissertation contributes to scholarship in the field of South Asian religions by considering distinct expressions of devotionalism (*bhakti*) in middle-class communities of modern, urban India and the enduring significance of premodern Hindu texts in contemporary contexts. More broadly, this project participates in ongoing discussions of how communities around the world continue to address current social and ethical dilemmas through the lived practices of scriptural interpretation.

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Note on Translation and Transliteration

All translations of Hindi and Gujarati that appear in this dissertation are my own unless otherwise noted. All translations from Sanskrit are attributed accordingly. When discussing Sanskrit sources and terms therein, I have tried to follow the conventions of contemporary Sanskritists. For example, भागवतपुराण = *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* and जीव = *jīva*. In the context of discussing Hindi and Gujarati literature, however, I omit the inherent *a* vowel so જીવ/जीव = *jīv*—except in the case of certain conjunct letters that are naturally pronounced with the vowel (e.g., દ્રવ્ય = *dravya*, but સિદ્ધાન્ત = *siddhānt*). Another exception to this rule is in the case of verse in Hindi or Gujarati where the Sanskrit convention will be maintained. Diacritic marks will only appear on text names or on terms that appear in italics. Therefore all proper names will appear without diacritics and as they are commonly transcribed into English (e.g., Vallabhācārya = Vallabhacharya, Vaiṣṇava = Vaishnava, Kṛṣṇa = Krishna, Braj Bhāṣā = Braj Bhasha, and Aḍel = Adel etc.). The exception to this rule is that in my citations and bibliography I use conventional diacritic marks for the names of authors whose works were composed in Indian languages (the same goes for names of publishers, but not of place names). The first letter of all words (except for post-positions and conjunctions etc.) are capitalized in the titles of Indian language texts, such as *Rāst Goftār* or *Caurāsī Vaiṣṇavan kī Vārtā*. Words that do appear with diacritic marks will correspond to the following chart:

અ/अ *a*	આ/आ *ā*	ઇ/इ *i*	ઈ/ई *ī*	ઉ/उ *u*	ઊ/ऊ *ū*
ઋ/ऋ *ṛ*	એ/ए *e*	ઐ/ऐ *ai*	ઓ/ओ *o*	ઔ/औ *au*	
ક/क *ka*	ખ/ख *kha*	ગ/ग *ga*	ઘ/घ *gha*		
ચ/च *ca*	છ/छ *cha*	જ/ज़ *ja/za*	ઝ/झ *jha*		
ટ/ट *ṭa*	ઠ/ठ *ṭha*	ડ/ड़ *ḍa/ṛa*	ઢ/ढ़ *ḍha/ ṛha*	ણ/ण *ṇa*	
ત/त *ta*	થ/थ *tha*	દ/द *da*	ધ/ध *dha*	ન/न *na*	
પ/प *pa*	ફ/फ़ *pha/fa*	બ/ब *ba*	ભ/भ *bha*	મ/म *ma*	
ય/य *ya*	ર/र *ra*	લ/ल *la*	વ/व *va*		
શ/श *śa*	ષ/ष *ṣa*	સ/स *sa*	હ/ह *ha*[1]		

Words transliterated from Gujarati follow the Hindi syllabary chart above except for in the case of ળ ḷa, which is specific to the Gujarati syllabary. Vowel nasality is shown with *ṃ* (e.g., नहीं = *nahīṃ* etc.). The nasal consonant ङ will be transliterated as *ṅa* (hence *satsaṅg*), and ञ as *ña* (hence *jñān*).

[1] The table is adapted from: R.S. McGregor, *The Oxford Hindi-English Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

Introduction: Reading an Ethnography of Reading

कवितार्थ जानों नहीं कछुक भयो संबोध ।
भूल्यो भ्रम ते जो कछुक सुकबि पढ़ैगे सोध ॥

I know nothing of poetic muse, save what little I have picked up;
the skilled poet, reading this work, will emend it where I have erred.[1]
-Matiram, *Rasrāj*.

Preface

It is an August evening in Ahmedabad city, the largest urban center of India's western state of Gujarat. The monsoon has come in full force this year, which is a welcome change in the otherwise rather dry region. In the densely populated city, though, the rains have slowed things down considerably. In the narrow lanes of Kalupur, a district in Ahmedabad's old walled-city, the rain has caused flash flooding and everything has come to a standstill. At one of Kalupur's primary Hindu temples, the Goswami Haveli, nearly one hundred devotees have arrived to take *darśan*—that is, to see and be seen by the local form of Krishna who is housed there. The large wooden doors of the temple remain closed, as preparations for *darśan* are still underway, and everyone huddles in the covered areas outside the building to wait, watching the rain. "Just look at it come down," one woman smiles and claps her hands, letting out a whoop of joy. "The monsoons bring so much joy." When the doors finally open, signaled by the ringing of a bell, those gathered rush inside, sliding on the wet marble floors as they make their way to the front of the red gate that separates the deity from the crowd. One of the temple's primary

[1] Trans. Rupert Snell, *The Hindi Classical Tradition: A Braj Bhāṣā Reader* (London: School of Oriental and African Studies, 1991), 49.

leaders, Tilak Goswami, flings open the curtain to reveal the image of Krishna. The image—a mere five inches in height—wears a turquoise costume, a turquoise crown, and is seated on a large human-sized swing, which is decorated in turquoise, bead-encrusted cloth. Tilak Goswami wears a turquoise sash over his white garments. His wife, mother, and two young sons, who have joined him to ceremoniously serve the deity, are also clad in the color. The two boys dart about as their parents and grandmother perform the service by gently rocking the deity on the swing and offering him flowers and a variety of food items—sweets, fruits, and saffron milk. The women's turquoise *sāṛī*s shine with silver embroidery. The devotees, also wearing various shades of blue and green to match Krishna and his caretakers, feast their eyes on the scene. A small group of men and women sit to the side of the crowd on the floor, performing *kīrtan*, or devotional songs, to correspond with the occasion. The songs' old Hindi lyrics, composed some five hundred years ago, tell of Lord Krishna's divine pastimes during the monsoons, when he teased, charmed, and romanced the beautiful maidens of his earthly home in Braj. On this day, however, the sound of the rain nearly drowns out the voices, drums, and harmonium. Everything is just rain and turquoise.

When the fifteen-minute *darśan* period has ended, Tilak Goswami and his family close the curtain, putting Krishna to sleep for the night. They then exit the temple and seat themselves in the adjacent meeting hall. Just as he does every Sunday evening, Tilak Goswami will lead his congregation in the group reading of hagiographies, which provide prose accounts of his own ancestors and their beloved disciples who lived during the sixteenth century. Perching himself on a cushioned chair in front of those gathered—

women, men, and children—Tilak Goswami begins to read. The atmosphere is celebratory and many devotees chime in to ask questions, to comment, and to discuss and debate the meaning of the sacred stories. Others lean against the wall and close their eyes, while still others run after young children, who race in and out of the temple, tracking in mud and screeching with delight. The discussion lasts for several hours—far longer than usual, due to the heavy rain. When Tilak Goswami finally closes the large book from which he has been reading, wrapping it carefully in yellow cloth, it is nearly midnight. The entire congregation concludes its meeting in a collective prayer, honoring each other as fellow devotees, the figures about whom they have just read in the hagiographies, their *guru*s, and Lord Krishna. Auto rickshaws are finally running again and so people say departing farewells—*Jai Shri Krishna! Hail to Lord Krishna*—and head home, concluding their turquoise monsoon evening.

The Goswami Haveli is one of dozens of temples in Ahmedabad city that belongs to the Hindu sectarian tradition known as the Vallabh Sampraday—the *sampradāy*, or the sect, of Vallabh.[2] Vallabh Bhatt (1479-1531) was an *ācārya* ("preceptor" or theologian, hereafter Vallabhacharya) who lived and wrote during the sixteenth century in north India. Hagiographies of Vallabhacharya, his descendants, and their disciples are enshrined in a canon of seventeenth-century Hindi texts, known as *vārtā*s (lit. "accounts"

[2] *Sampradāy* refers to the transmission of a system of religious teaching from one generation to the next: "an established doctrine, persuasion or system of teaching; a religious sect; school (of thought); a religious community" (McGregor, *The Oxford Hindi-English Dictionary*, 967). I have made a conscious choice to use the word "sect," fully aware of the connotations in the Christian context. While sect comes from the Latin root *secare*, which indicates fracture, and *sampradāy*, as noted above, denotes a system of religious teaching from one generation to the next, that which constitutes a *sampradāy* as a *sampradāy* relies on clear lines of inclusion and exclusion.

or "chronicles"). Through telling the sacred life stories of the tradition's early leaders and their disciples, the *vārtā*s offer sectarian history, practical theology, and didactic accounts of social and devotional conduct. In urban Gujarat, home to the majority of the Vallabh Sampraday's followers, the *vārtā*s continue to be enormously popular texts, which are widely read and discussed by devotees in private homes, in sectarian temples—such as the Goswami Haveli—and even on the Internet.

In this Introduction I first provide further background on the Vallabh Sampraday followed by a brief review of previous scholarship on the sect, on the *vārtā*s, and on living textual traditions in India more broadly. This leads me to further discuss how I situate myself, theoretically and methodologically, in the field of religious studies and in the study of South Asian religions specifically. Here I include a brief account of my experiences conducting ethnographic research in Gujarat. Finally, I state the primary goals of this dissertation and provide a synopsis of each of its four chapters.

I. The Vallabh Sampraday—Then and Now

The Vallabh Sampraday is a Krishnaite devotional community that was established around the philosophical teachings of Vallabhacharya. While his family hailed from the Telugu-speaking region of south India (in today's Andhra Pradesh), Vallabhacharya and his immediate successors first attracted a community of devotees in and around the region of Braj—a center of Krishna devotion in north India, which became increasingly popular amongst Vaishnava sectarian traditions during the sixteenth

century.[3] Although the term Vaishnava broadly refers to devotees of the Hindu deity Vishnu and his various *avatār*s ("manifestations"), one of the shared features of Braj-based Vaishnava traditions that developed during the sixteenth century is that Krishna is conceived of as Supreme Being.

Along with the *Bhagavadgīta*, the text that is most commonly used to establish the theology of Krishna as Supreme Being is the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*—a Sanskrit text likely redacted in south India between the ninth and thirteenth centuries (CE).[4] In addition to asserting the superiority of Krishna as Supreme Being, the *BhP*, particularly its tenth book, famously describes the *līlā* ("divine pastimes") of Krishna as a playful child and amorous youth in the land of Braj. The primacy of these devotional narratives are common to the Vallabh Sampraday and to other Vaishnava sects that have roots in the Braj region, including the Gaudiya Sampraday, the Nimbark Sampraday, the Radhavallabh Sampraday, and the Sakhi, or Haridas Sampraday.[5] Like the Vallabh Sampraday, all of these groups were established around the teachings of Brahmins, even though they theoretically allowed for devotees of lower-castes. *Bhakti*, or devotion, rather than caste, was envisioned as the primary measure of the individual's ability to form a relationship with Krishna.

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[3] For a comprehensive study of the region, see: Alan W. Entwistle, *Braj: Centre of Krishna Pilgrimage* (Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 1987). Braj is not a region recognized by any political or administrative map, but has rather been defined by popular Krishna devotion. Much of the region as it is imagined today through pilgrimage routes, sacred sites such as temples and shines, and devotional narratives, falls in the contemporary state of Uttar Pradesh's Mathura District.

[4] Edwin F. Bryant, trans., *Krishna: The Beautiful Legend of God*: *(Śrīmad Bhāgavata Purāṇa Book X)* (London: Penguin, 2003), xvi.

[5] Entwistle, *Braj: Centre of Krishna Pilgrimage*, 9.

While these *bhakti* traditions share certain theological and socio-cultural positions with each other, there is much that is distinctive about each of the Braj-based *sampradāy*s, both historically and in the contemporary context. One of the ways in which these *sampradāy*s articulated distinction during the premodern period was through the telling of, and often the writing of, hagiography. The record of hagiography in the Vallabh Sampraday reveals the various, and sometimes competing, ways in which Vallabhacharya's descendants and followers remembered and re-imagined the teachings of their first preceptor, as well as the distinct identity of the community that grew around him. As Tony K. Stewart has written with respect to sacred biography in the Gaudiya Sampraday: "Each generation [of devotees] was charged with the responsibility of revalorizing its tradition without destroying it, to make it relevant to a contemporary world without having to diverge from the general consensus of its broad normative ideals, to make its history relevant […]."[6] The process of writing hagiography, Stewart suggests, might be thought of in terms of a process of "fixing a 'grammar' of Vaiṣṇava ritual and theology," which eventually works in "structuring individual and group experience, structuring community, structuring the tradition's own history."[7] As we will see repeatedly throughout this dissertation, it is not only the act of writing, but also the act of reading hagiography that contributes to the ongoing process of celebrating and (re)articulating sectarian identity. In contemporary Gujarat this process is ongoing,

[6] Tony K. Stewart, *The Final Word: The Caitanya Caritāmṛta and the Grammar of Religious Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 9.

[7] Ibid.

suggesting that we might consider the living tradition of *vārtā* hagiography in terms of a *negotiable* grammar, rather than a fixed grammar, of tradition.

Many of the texts that constitute the *vārtā* canon were written during the late seventeenth century in Braj Bhasha, a regional dialect of Hindi. Although authorship is contested, it is likely that all of the *vārtā* texts were composed and edited by Vallabhacharya's descendants and disciples living in north and northwest India. As the *vārtā*s were based on a tradition of oral storytelling, their prose narratives have a distinctly conversational quality, which is retained even in the modern Gujarati translations of the texts that are popular today. Indeed, as we will see throughout this dissertation, devotees' ongoing conversations about the hagiographies are key to how the *vārtā* tradition has been kept alive over several centuries.

Through the form of sacred biography, the *vārtā*s speak both to the broader socio-cultural milieu of late-medieval India—particularly north and northwest India, where the *sampradāy* first developed—but also to the specific details of sectarian relationships, hierarchies, devotional affect, and ritual practices. While there are non-sectarian sources for learning about the early growth of the community (e.g., imperial records, texts from other religious traditions, architecture, oral histories etc.), still much of what we know of the Vallabh Sampraday's past comes through the lens of the sectarian hagiographies themselves. It is from these accounts, for instance, that we first see references to how the tradition passed down religious authority from Vallabhacharya through male primogeniture. Vallabhacharya's living male descendants, often called *mahārāj*s or *gosvāmī*s, are still acknowledged as the *sampradāy*'s primary leaders. Collectively,

Vallabhacharya, his descendants and their families are called the Vallabh Kul (the "Vallabh Dynasty").[8] In addition to caring for sectarian deities housed in temples, these leaders are generally responsible for initiating new devotees into the fold, and for offering guidance with respect to the method of worshipping Krishna that has become specific to this tradition. This method of worship, known as *sevā* ("loving service"), is discussed at length in the *vārtā*s, which describe how religious leaders and lay devotees of the past cared for divine images of Krishna, known as *svarūp*s (or "essential forms" of the deity) in both private homes and in sectarian temples. Today the practice of *sevā* continues to be an important element of worship for lay devotees of the *sampradāy*, many of whom ritually care for *svarūp*s in their homes. Likewise, many of the *svarūp*s that became primary during the sixteenth century are still worshiped in sectarian temples, which mark the sacred landscape of the living tradition.

While Braj continues to be an important site of pilgrimage, the *sampradāy*'s primary Krishna *svarūp*, Shrinathji, has been housed in a temple in Nathdwara, Rajasthan since the late seventeenth century. The vast majority of devotees and religious leaders,

[8] The term Vallabh Kul is used to refer to Vallabhacharya and *all* of his living descendants. Occasionally, however, those descendants who are born from the maternal line (that is, from *beṭījī*s, or "respected daughters" of the tradition) will be referred to as the Vallabh Parivar (the "family" of Vallabh). Since this distinction is uncommon I refer to all of Vallabhacharya's descendants as members of the Vallabh Kul. I will discuss the various hierarchies of the sect in Chapter One. As a vocative, the term *mahārāj* can be used to refer to any male member of the Vallabh Kul, but as a formal title it is reserved for the eldest male member of a particular branch of the Vallabh Kul. Therefore, in any given immediate family-unit of the Vallabh Kul there can only be one living *mahārāj*. Other male (and sometimes female) members of a household are often given the title *gosvāmī* or, especially in the case of a younger person or child, *bābā* or *bāvā*. *Gosvāmī* literally means "lord of cows" and is an honorary title that is affixed to the names of religious leaders in the Vallabh Sampraday and also in other Vaishnava communities. The term *mahārāj* can have the more general meanings of: "great king: emperor; form of address to a *brāhmaṇ* (often as cook), or to a superior" (McGregor, *The Hindi-English Dictionary,* 800).

however, reside neither in Braj nor in Rajasthan, but rather in Gujarat's major urban centers, in the city of Mumbai, and increasingly in European and North American diasporas. Hailing from traditionally merchant backgrounds, today's devotees tend to be affluent and are active in various business sectors, such as real estate, commercial trade, and industrial development.

II. Previous Scholarship on the Vallabh Sampraday

There has never been a full-scale study of the *vārtā*s' religious and social significance for members of the Vallabh Sampraday, past or present. With the exception of Christian L. Novetzke's *Religion and Public Memory: A Cultural History of Saint Namdev in India* and Karen G. Ruffle's, *Gender, Sainthood, and Everyday Practice in South Asian Shi'ism*, there have been no major studies of the contemporary use of premodern hagiographies in South Asia.[9] As I discuss below, previous scholarship on the *vārtā*s has often focused on the hagiographies' place in the Hindi literary canon and also on how the texts can be used to construct social histories of the *sampradāy*.

Since the nineteenth century, the most popular area of scholarly interest on the Vallabh Sampraday has been the Sanskrit theological treatises and commentaries attributed to Vallabhacharya and to his early descendants. Contemporary scholarship on this topic—including work by James D. Redington and Frederick M. Smith—has been

[9] See: Christian Lee Novetzke, *Religion and Public Memory: A Cultural History of Saint Namdev in India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008); Karen G. Ruffle, *Gender, Sainthood, and Everyday Practice in South Asian Shi'ism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011).

crucial for understanding the complex philosophical framework of the sect and its relationship to other Vaishnava theological systems.[10]

Scholars have also attended to the social organization of the *sampradāy* and to the complexities and visual aesthetics of *sevā* for Shrinathji and other *svarūp*s housed in sectarian temples (e.g., Peter Bennett and Woodman Lyon Taylor).[11] Others have rightly focused on the socio-religious aspects of sacred food offerings, which are integral to temple *sevā* (e.g., Paul Toomey).[12] Likewise, there have been significant contributions to

[10] I refer to Smith's work throughout the dissertation, including: Frederick M. Smith, "The *Saṃnyāsanirṇayaḥ*: A Śuddhādvaita Text on Renunciation by Vallabhācārya," *Journal of Vaishnava Studies* 1, no. 4 (1993): 135-156; "*Nirodha* and the *Nirodhalakṣāṇa* of Vallabhācārya," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 26, no. 6 (1998): 589-651; "Vedic and Devotional Waters: The Jalabheda of Vallabhācārya," *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 10, no. 1 (2005): 107-136; "The Hierarchy of Philosophical Systems According to Vallabhācārya," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 33, no. 4 (2005): 421-453; "Dark Matter in Vārtāland: on the Enterprise of History in Early Puṣṭimārga Discourse," *Journal of Hindu Studies* 2, no. 1 (2009): 27-47; "Predestination and Hierarchy: Vallabhācārya's Discourse on the Distinctions Between Blessed, Rule-Bound, Worldly, and Wayward Souls (the *Puṣṭipravāhamaryādābheda*)," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 39 (2011): 173-227. In Chapter One, I rely heavily on Redington's translations, including: James D. Redington, "The Last Days of Vallabhacarya," *Journal of Vaishnava Studies* 1, no. 4 (1983): 109-134; *Śrīsubodhinī: Vallabhācārya on the Love Games of Kṛṣṇa* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1983); "Elements of a Vallabhite Bhakti-Synthesis," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 112, no. 2 (1992): 287-294; *The Grace of Lord Krishna: The Sixteen Verse-Treatises (Ṣoḍaśagranthāḥ) of Vallabhacharya* (Delhi: Sri Satguru Publications, 2000).

[11] Bennett's work includes: Peter Bennett, "In Nanda Baba's House: The Devotional Experience in Pushti Marg Temples," in *Divine Passions: The Social Construction of Emotion in India*, edited by Owen M. Lynch (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 182-211; "Krishna's Own Form: Image Worship and the Pushti Marga," *Journal of Vaishnava Studies* 1, no. 4 (1993): 109-134; *The Path of Grace: Social Organisation and Temple Worship in a Vaishnava Sect* (Delhi: Hindustan Publishing Corporation, 1993). Taylor's work includes: Woodman Lyon Taylor, "Visual Culture in Performative Practice: The Aesthetics, Politics and Poetics of Visuality in Liturgical Practices of the Vallabha Sampradaya Hindu Community at Kota" (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 1997); "Picture Practice: Painting Programs, Manuscript Production, and Liturgical Performances at the Kotah Royal Palace," in *Gods, Kings, and Tigers: The Art of Kotah,* edited by Stuart Cary Welch (Munich: Prestel Verlag, 1997), 61-72.

[12] Paul M. Toomey, "Food from the Mouth of Krishna: Socio-Religious Aspects of Sacred Food in Two Krishnaite Sects," in *Food Society, and Culture: Aspects in South Asia Food Systems*

the study of music and art specific to the sect, including the work of Amit Ambalal, Anne-Marie Gaston, and Meilu Ho, who have written on temple painting, music, and devotional singing respectively.[13] In her study, Ho provides both a history of the liturgical music of the Vallabh Sampraday and fine ethnographic accounts of how *kīrtan* continues to be sung in Braj temples today.

While Ho's ethno-musicological approach to *kīrtan* performance is unique, several scholars (e.g., Kenneth E. Bryant, A. Whitney Sanford, and John Stratton Hawley) have also attended to the textual histories and aesthetics of these songs' poetic lyrics.[14] The most prominent poetic compositions in the *sampradāy* are attributed to a

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Food, Society, and Culture, edited by R.S. Khare and M.S.A. Rao (Durham: Carolina Academic, 1986), 55-83; "Krishna's Consuming Passions: Food as Metaphor and Metonym for Emotion at Mount Govardhan," in *Divine Passions: The Social Construction of Emotion in India*, edited by Owen M. Lynch (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 157-181; "Mountain of Food, Mountain of Love: Ritual Inversion in the Annakuta Feast at Mount Govardhan," in *The Eternal Food: Gastronomic Ideas and Experiences of Hindus and Buddhists*, edited by R.S. Khare (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 117-146.

[13] See: Amit Ambalal, *Krishna as Shrinathji: Rajasthani Paintings from Nathdvara* (Ahmedabad: Mapin Publishing, 1987). For another monograph on contemporary painting practices in the town of Nathdwara, see: Tryna Lyons, *The Artists of Nathadwara: The Practice of Painting in Rajasthan* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004). For Gaston's work, see: Anne-Marie Gaston, *Krishna's Musicians: Musicians and Music Making in the Temples of Nathdvara, Rajasthan* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1997); "Continuity of Tradition in the Music of Nathdvara: A Participant-Observer's View," in *The Idea of Rajasthan: Explorations in Regional Identity*, Vol. I, edited by Karine Schomer et al. (New Delhi: Manohar, 1994), 238-277. For Ho's work, see: Meilu Ho, "The Liturgical Music of the Puṣṭi Mārg of India: An Embryonic Form of the Classical Tradition" (PhD diss., University of California-Los Angeles, 2006). For a brief article on music in the sect, see: Guy L. Beck, "Vaishnava Music and the Braj Region of Northern India," *Journal of Vaishnava Studies* 4, no. 2 (1996): 115-148.

[14] See: Kenneth E. Bryant, *Poems to the Child-God: Structures and Strategies in the Poetry of Surdas* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979); A. Whitney Sanford, *Singing Krishna: Sound Becomes Sight in Paramānand's Poetry* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008). Hawley's publications on Surdas include: John Stratton Hawley, *Three Bhakti Voices: Mirabai, Surdas, and Kabir in their Time and Ours* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005);

group of eight poets, known as the *aṣṭachāp*, who wrote in Braj Bhasha and whose lives and poems are remembered in the *vārtā*s as central to the formation of the community.[15] In his in-depth study of the poetry attributed to Surdas (the most celebrated of the *aṣṭachāp* poets), John Stratton Hawley (2009) has also considered how the *vārtā* hagiographies tell the life of the poet. The *vārtā*s' authors, Hawley suggests, used various rhetorical devices to ensure that the reader accepts that the famed figure was exclusively dedicated to Vallabhacharya, when in fact there is little evidence beyond sectarian texts to suggest that Surdas had any such affiliation with the *sampradāy*. Aside from these studies of Braj Bhasha poetry and authors, the only book-length studies of the sect's vernacular literature are Dwarkadas Purushottamdas Parikh's (Gujarati and Hindi) *Prācīn Vārtā Rahasya* and Hariharnath Tandan's (Hindi) *Vārtā Sāhitya: Ek Vṛhat Adhyayan*.[16] Parikh was a devoted follower of the *sampradāy* who also edited several popular volumes of major *vārtā* texts that will be discussed in this dissertation. His *Prācīn Vārtā Rahasya* is essentially a collection of essays, which offer an extended historical and theological commentary on the *vārtā* tradition. These essays include extensive notes on language and history, as well as charts describing the intricate details of each of the figures whose lives are told in the texts. Tandan, a Hindi literary critic, provides in his book a comprehensive account of the *vārtā*s' textual history and of the texts' position in the larger world of

The Memory of Love: Surdas Sings to Krishna (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); *Sūrdās: Poet Singer, Saint* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1984).

[15] Literally, *aṣṭachāp* means the "eight seals." *Chāp* refers to the "seal," or signature of a poet, which, appearing in a line of verse, confirms or alleges authorship by that named poet.

[16] See: Dvārkādās Puruṣottamdās Parīkh, *Prācīn Vārtā Rahasya* (*bhāg 1-3*) (Kankroli: Śrī Vidyāvibhāg, 1939); Hariharnāth Ṭaṇḍan, *Vārtā Sāhitya: Ek Vṛhat Adhyayan* (Aligarh: Bhārat Prakāśa Mandir, 1960).

Hindi literature.

Other scholars writing in Hindi, such as Prabhudayal Mital, have used the *vārtā*s as primary historical sources with which to reconstruct narrative histories of the *sampradāy*.[17] Shandip Saha, a Canadian historian, writes that while Mital's book, *Braj Dharm ke Sampradāyoṃ kā Itihās*, shows remarkable attention to critical historical method, it is still a "sectarian history." That is, Saha accuses Mital of being "very reverential to his subject matter" and of being unwilling to sacrifice his "religious convictions and beliefs for the sake of critical scholarship."[18] Clearly Saha's reaction to Mital's work flags the different, and sometimes opposing, agendas of social historians working within the Western academy and those producing historiography from within the sect itself. While my study is not focused on competing narratives of so-called objective pasts, per se, I remain alert to such distinctions in my own writing, and do attend to the various ways in which those from within the sect have imagined sectarian histories through retelling and commenting on the *vārtā*s.

Saha's own research—as well as the work of other historians (e.g., Allen Edwin Richardson, Amrita Shodhan, Charlotte Vaudeville, Norbert Peabody, and Vasudha Dalmia)—provides a rather comprehensive social history of the *sampradāy*, with a particular emphasis on the ways in which the community responded to political and

[17] See, for example: Prabhudayāl Mītal, *Braj ke Dharm Sampradāyoṃ kā Itihās* (Delhi: National Publishing House, 1968).

[18] Shandip Saha, "A Community of Grace: the Social and Theological World of the Puṣṭi Mārga Vārtā Literature," *Bulletin of SOAS* 69, no. 2 (2006): 11.

economic changes from the late seventeenth through the early twentieth centuries.[19]

Richard K. Barz is the only scholar to have written at length on the literary and aesthetic qualities as well as the theological sentiments of the *vārtā*s. His book, *The Bhakti Sect of Vallabhācārya*, is the most comprehensive introduction to the theology of the *sampradāy* to date and also provides English translations of and extensive notes on the oldest and most popular *vārtā* text of the sectarian canon—the *Caurāsī Vaiṣṇavan kī Vārtā* ("Chronicles of Eighty-Four Vaishnavas").[20]

This previous scholarship on the *vārtā*s and on other aspects of the Vallabh

[19] Shandip Saha's writings also include: "Creating a Community of Grace: a History of the Puṣṭi Mārga in Northern and Western India: 1493-1905" (PhD diss., University of Ottawa, 2004); "The Movement of *Bhakti* along a North-West Axis: Tracing the History of the Puṣṭimārg between the Sixteenth and Nineteenth Centuries," *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 11, no. 3 (2008): 299-318. See also: Edwin Allen Richardson, "Mughal and Rajput Patronage of the Bhakti Sect of the Maharajas, the Vallabha Sampradaya: 1640-1760 AD" (PhD diss., University of Arizona, 1979); Amrita Shodhan, "Legal Representations of Khojas and Pushtimārga Vaishnava Polities as Communities: The Aga Khan Case and the Maharaj Libel Case in Mid-Nineteenth Century Bombay" (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 1995); Charlotte Vaudeville, *Myths, Saints and Legends in Medieval India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996); Norbert Peabody, *Hindu Kingship and Polity in Precolonial India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003). Dalmia's writing includes: Vasudha Dalmia, "The Establishment of the Sixth *Gaddī* of the Vallabha Sampradāy: Narrative Structure and the Use of Authority in a *Vārtā* of the Nineteenth Century," in *Studies in South Asian Devotional Literature, Research Papers, Proceedings of the Fifth International Conference on Devotional Literature in New Indo-Aryan Languages*, edited by Alan Entwistle and Françoise Mallison (Delhi: Manohar in Association with École Française d'Extrême-Orient, 1994), 94-117; "Forging Community: The Guru in a Seventeenth-century Vaiṣṇava Hagiography," in *Charisma and Canon*, edited by Vasudha Dalmia, Angelika Malinar, and Martin Christof (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 129-154; "Women, Duty and Sanctified Space in a Vaiṣṇava Hagiography of the Seventeenth Century," in *Constructions Hagiographiques dans le Monde Indien: Entre Myth et Histoire*, edited by Françoise Mallison (Paris: Champion, 2001), 205-219.

[20] See: Richard K. Barz, *The Bhakti Sect of Vallabhācārya* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1992); "Kṛṣṇadās Adhikārī: An Irascible Devotee's Approach to the Divine," in *Bhakti Studies*, edited by Greg M. Bailey and Ian Kesarcodi-Watson (New Delhi: Sterling, 1992), 236-262; "The *Caurāsī Vaiṣṇavan kī Vārtā* and the Hagiography of the Puṣṭimārg," in *According to Tradition: Hagiographical Writing in India*, edited by Winand M. Callawaert and Rupert Snell (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1994), 44-64.

Sampraday has provided vital background for the present study, which focuses on the ways in which the hagiographies have continued to inform and inspire modern audiences.

III. Theoretical and Methodological Frameworks

Several overlapping currents in contemporary scholarship on religion, literature, and performance inform my approach to the *vārtā* hagiographies and their reception in modern Gujarat. The first is what has, over the past two decades, come to be called the "lived religions" approach. In the introduction to his second edition of *The Madonna of 115th Street: Faith and Community in Italian Harlem*, Robert A. Orsi writes that:

> The study of lived religion situates all religious creativity within culture and approaches religion as lived experience […] the study of lived religion directs attention to institutions *and* persons, texts *and* rituals, practice *and* theology, things *and* ideas—all as media of making and unmaking worlds. This way of approaching religious practice as fundamentally and always *in* history and culture is concerned with what people *do* with religious idioms, how they use them, what they make of themselves and their worlds with them, and how in turn people are fundamentally shaped by the worlds they are making as they make these worlds.[21]

Accordingly, while I approach the *vārtā*s as physical texts that hold cultural value before and after their use by readers, I focus primarily on the hagiographies in terms of their reception in specific historical and social contexts. Religious texts and their interpretations are, I suggest, always dependent on and embedded in people's everyday lives and in the larger web of human and divine relationships.

Indeed, the *vārtā*s as texts are the primary focus of this study in the sense that I take the study of these texts to include the study of real (often living) readers' hermeneutic practices. This refers to the second aspect of my theoretical approach in this

[21] Robert A. Orsi, *The Madonna of 115th Street: Faith and Community in Italian Harlem, 1880-1950* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), xix.

dissertation: a commitment to considering written texts through readers' reception. In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Michel de Certeau—in conversation with the work of Kant, Wittgenstein, Foucault, and Ricoeur—writes that regardless of "whether it is a question of newspapers or Proust, the text has a meaning only through its readers; it changes along with them; it is ordered in accord with codes of perception that it does not control."[22] In a wonderfully vivid analogy, de Certeau compares the reader to a renter making habitable an apartment: "renters make comparable changes in an apartment they furnish with their acts and memories; as do speakers, in the language into which they insert both messages of native tongue, through their accent, through their own 'turns of phrase,' etc., their own history […]."[23] While de Certeau's project is more generally concerned with how people navigate everyday life—in relationship to popular culture, rituals, language, and laws—and make it their own, his assertions about readers and text correspond quite closely to the work of so-called reader-response theorists. For one such theorist, Stanley E. Fish, the act of reading should be approached as an "event," which is primarily understood through making sense of a text's intended audience, or the "informed reader."[24] Similarly, Wolfgang Iser, drawing on German phenomenological philosophy, came up with the notion of the "implied reader." Like Fish's informed reader, Iser's implied reader is a

[22] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, translated by Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 171.

[23] Ibid., xxi.

[24] Stanley E. Fish, *Self-Consuming Artifacts: The Experience of Seventeenth-Century Literature* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), 407.

construct (not a "real" reader).[25] According to Iser, when the implied reader approaches a text, he or she should be able to determine implicit assumptions that the text makes about its audience and what this audience knows and believes. The reader's role is thus pre-structured by three basic components: "the different perspectives represented in the text, the vantage point from which he joins them together, and the meeting place where they converge."[26] In this way, texts themselves do not provide us with everything that we need to know in order to make "meaning happen"—texts are incomplete and rely on the implied reader to "fill in the gaps." In order to fill in the gaps of a text, argues Iser, readers must share a "common frame of reference" with the implied reader.[27] This common frame of reference means that readers need to know the various social, historical, etc. building blocks that provide the necessary "gestalt" from which a text's literary conventions are built.

These theoretical frameworks are key to how I approach the *vārtā*s. In the context of my study, however, reader-response theories fall short in two significant ways—such theories do not account for "real" readers or for readers that read primarily religious texts. While Iser refers to interpretive *communities*, his reader remains isolated—he or she is not conceptualized in the context of human (or more-than-human) social contexts. This dissertation is concerned precisely with real, rather than idealized, readers who participate in living interpretive communities. How, I ask, do readers of the *vārtā*s

[25] Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 36.

[26] Ibid., 34.

[27] Ibid., 167.

interact with these texts? How do they "fill in the gaps"? What is the "gestalt" of these reading communities ("interpretive communities")? Furthermore, the readers that I consider cannot be thought of in terms of mere "renters" in an "apartment" (to return to de Certeau's analogy). Rather, the readers of the *vārtā*s take up permanent residence in the world around these hagiographies—that is, they make and become part of the texts' world. These texts and the practices of reading and interpreting them are key to the ongoing negotiation of identity and to everyday social and devotional practices in the Vallabh Sampraday.

Several contemporary scholars have inspired my approach to religious reading as a lived and performed practice—often through the lens of ethnographic research as well as through the close study of textual commentaries, both written and oral. Philip Lutgendorf's study of the *Rāmcaritmānas*, for instance, considers both the contexts of theatrical and musical performance that surround the sixteenth-century Hindi text, and the ways in which such performances continue to instigate controversy and debate over the epic's social and religious teachings.[28] This is particularly true, he writes, of the ways in which family dynamics are portrayed in Tulsidas' text, which contemporary readers interpret in various ways according to their own experiences and ideals.[29] In a slightly different cultural context, Karen Ruffle has written about how ritual readings and theatrical performances of hagiography in the Shi'a community of Hyderabad function as "forms of moral communication in which the imagination of Karbala and the family of

[28] Philip Lutgendorf, *The Life of a Text: Performing the Rāmcaritmānas of Tulsidas* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 341.

[29] Ibid., 344-351.

Imam Husain generates sensibilities and an ethical worldview that orders the life of South Asian Shi'a."[30] Syed Akbar Hyder, who has also written on Shi'i hagiography, considers the context of *majli*s (commemorative gatherings), in which the interpretation of the Karbala narrative, in both historical and moral terms, is dependent on the "readers'/listeners' (interpretive community's) situational hermeneutics."[31] Such performative traditions of reading and moral-ethical dialogue are also common to religious traditions beyond the sub-continent and point to shared practices of scriptural interpretation. Jonathan Boyarin, for example, suggests that Jewish sacred literature, beginning with the Bible, is a central means of a dynamic tradition, which itself arose in the context of oral storytelling. Therefore, he argues, the tradition of biblical literature demands that people discuss the texts in groups, "creating a community of Jews over time through Jewish study…which revives voices in the past, creates a voice for the present, and seeks faithfully to await a liberated, tradition-filled future."[32] While all making nuanced arguments with reference to very specific socio-historical contexts, the authors of these works are similarly concerned with how the practices of reading—namely the composition of commentaries and scriptural interpretations—reveal the ways in which

[30] Ruffle, *Gender, Sainthood, and Everyday Practice*, 2.

[31] Syed Akbar Hyder, *Reliving Karbala: Martyrdom in South Asian Memory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 74.

[32] Jonathan Boyarin, "Voices around the Text: The Ethnography of Reading at Mesivta Tifereth Jerusalem," in *The Ethnography of Reading*, edited by Jonathan Boyarin (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 230.

religious identities are (re)constructed and moral worlds are created.[33]

Similar to all of these distinct, yet related practices of religious reading, the *vārtā*s, through their various aesthetic and structural features, continue to invite devotees to read the narratives aloud in groups, which become "occasions for dialogue."[34] These similarities across tradition seem, on the one hand, to be rather obvious—of course religious texts are read, discussed, and debated by living devotees who share distinct grammars of tradition. On the other hand, however, as William A. Graham has pointed out, the failure to take seriously these living performances and interpretations of premodern scripture can lead to distorted conclusions about the liturgical, didactic, ethical, socio-political, and, above all, devotional functions of such texts.[35] At the same time, however, the failure to engage in close readings of written texts "themselves" may also lead to distorted conclusions. A further interpretive challenge of my study is that I aim to make sense of texts and reading practices both in terms of these broader theoretical frameworks, which consider practices of religious reading comparatively, but also in terms of the frameworks that religious readers themselves employ (across time

[33] Other works that have informed my approach to reading, literature, and narrative ethics, but which I do not discuss at length in this dissertation, include: Paul J. Griffiths, *Religious Reading: The Place of Reading in the Practice of Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999) and Anne E. Monius, *Imagining a Place for Buddhism: Literary Culture and Religious Community in Tamil-Speaking South India* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001). As I discuss in Chapter Three, my work on reading practices also engages with: Leela Prasad, *Ethics in Everyday Hindu Life* (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2007). Prasad's book was also published under the following title: *Poetics of Conduct: Oral Narrative and Moral Being in a South Indian Town* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006).

[34] Boyarin, "Voices around the Text," 222.

[35] William A. Graham, *Beyond the Written Word: Oral Aspects of Scripture in the History of Religion* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

and in different social contexts).[36] Accordingly, research for this project crosses disciplinary boundaries, employing both ethnographic research as well as textual and historical analysis, and looking both at readers' interpretations of the *vārtā*s and at ways in which the form and aesthetics of the physical texts have influenced these interpretations.

IV. Ethnography and Ethnographic Voice

This study is based, in part, on ethnographic research and hence, is delivered, in part, through ethnographic writing. What do I mean by ethnography and what does such a methodological approach indicate about my own position as an "ethnographer"? Karen McCarthy Brown, in her book *Mama Lola: A Vodou Priestess in Brooklyn*, writes that "most anthropologists understand different cultures (a problematic term for which there is no good substitute) to be, at minimum, different ways of making meaning in the world." An ethnography, then, writes McCarthy, "is written by making meaning out of others' processes of meaning making."[37] While this may be *part* of what an ethnography entails, even McCarthy's own work proves that the process is far more complicated and dynamic. Very often "meaning-making" does not describe what is at stake for the people whose religious practices I have written about here. What is *always* at stake, I argue, is the process of building relationships between humans and between humans and the more-than-human (texts, God, sacred figures etc.). As Robert Orsi has suggested, the role of the

[36] For a similar argument, see: Joyce Burkhalter Flueckiger, *In Amma's Healing Room: Gender & Vernacular Islam in South India* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 22-35.

[37] Karen McCarthy Brown, *Mama Lola: A Vodou Priestess in Brooklyn* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), xi.

religious-studies scholar must be taken into account as *part of* this web of relationships.[38] Essentially then, I see my ethnographic research and writing in terms of analyzing and participating in such relationships.

I have regularly visited and studied in various parts of India since 2002 when I lived in Banaras as a student on the University of Wisconsin-Madison's College Year in India Program (2002-2003). I was first introduced to the Vallabh Sampraday during this trip and gradually, through many years of further Hindi and Gujarati language study and coursework in South Asian religions, began to focus first on the Braj Bhasha *vārtā*s and then on their contemporary reception in Gujarat. I lived in Ahmedabad city, where much of my ethnographic research was based, as a student of Gujarati for two summers (2008 and 2009) prior to my yearlong stay in the city for dissertation research (2011-2012). During these two summers, I began to build relationships with both the lay community and with religious leaders of the *sampradāy* in Ahmedabad and surrounding areas. Even during these two summers the process of relationship-building soon blended into my "research."

Although I did conduct formal interviews (over sixty-five in number) and spent a great deal of time in temples and other sectarian-specific spaces, much of my research happened in people's private homes—as an observer and participant in reading-group sessions, or more casually over tea or a meal. To create an ethnographic record I recorded the majority of my formal interviews and many of the reading-group sessions and other events that I attended. I was never told that I should not use my notebook or recorder (in

[38] Robert A. Orsi, *Between Heaven and Earth: The Religious Worlds People Make and the Scholars Who Study Them* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

fact, I was often reprimanded for *not* using my recorder as its use was perceived to indicate my interest in a particular conversation or event). Photography, on the other hand, is strictly prohibited in sectarian temples (except by official temple photographers) and in general made people uncomfortable in other situations. I therefore have a limited photo archive of my research and have, for this reason, excluded photographs from this dissertation.

In Ahmedabad I lived either with a family loosely affiliated with the *sampradāy* or with other students and scholars. I maintained certain social boundaries, which made my position in the community somewhat lopsided. For instance, while much of the time I spent with lay devotees for research was in people's private homes, I almost never invited people from the sectarian community into my own home. This changed towards the end of my yearlong stay in Ahmedabad, especially during the several months that my husband was living with me, when I made an effort to invite people into my own home for social gatherings. The reasons for this social distance were both related to my own personal desire for privacy, but also to the practical matter that many of the lay devotees with whom I worked were either not interested in maintaining relationships with me outside of the context of their homes or temples, or were not able, due to their own recognition of sectarian prescriptions, to eat food in my home. As discussed later in the dissertation, strict adherents to the *sampradāy* only eat food that has first been offered to the Krishna *svarūp*s they care for in their own homes. Moreover, food prepared by anyone who is not an initiated member of the sect is generally prohibited.

The Vallabh Sampraday is a sectarian tradition into which the devotee must be

formally initiated. Although there is only a small community of devotees (several dozen) who have been initiated into the *sampradāy* from families not previously affiliated with the sect (e.g., white Europeans or Americans), many devotees in Ahmedabad asked or strongly encouraged me to ask a religious leader for initiation. Once initiated, people argued, I would no longer be an "outsider" in the sense that I could fully participate in all ritual and social gatherings. This never became an uncomfortable issue (for me), but certainly one that I needed to constantly negotiate and explain. I always introduced myself as a student of Indian religions who studied the *vārtā* literature of the *sampradāy*. In the end, my actual access to community events and to people's domestic rituals was rather *un*limited. That is, even if I was not invited to participate physically in a certain event (e.g., preparing food for a temple deity), I was still able (and often encouraged) to be present and to observe—indeed, as a so-called "outsider." I was never once asked to be physically absent from an event and was even invited or requested to physically participate in certain *sevā* activities, particularly by sectarian leaders, who all seemed to be markedly less concerned about the boundaries of the initiated and uninitiated than devotees themselves. Why was I able to participate in the community in these ways? The men and women I spent time with were generally pleased that I had chosen to study their tradition's literature and were eager to teach me about their understandings of sectarian history, theology, and practice. Upon my return to the United States, I have kept in touch with many of the individuals with whom I worked closely, all of whom have asked to read my dissertation (the majority of those I worked with read English). Finally, devotees often stated that the reason I had chosen this topic of study was because I had good *bhāv*

("nature," in this case), and, whether I liked it or not, had been favored by the grace of Vallabhacharya's living descendants. How else could I have possibly chosen such a research topic? Why else would I have left my family and friends back in the United States to spend months studying sectarian literature? How else could I have taken such an interest in learning to read Braj Bhasha—the language of the *vārtā*s? Graced or not, I feel remarkably lucky to have been so welcomed by the community of devotees and religious leaders in Ahmedabad and to have been treated with great respect as a student and researcher—and in many cases as a friend. I can only hope that this dissertation displays my own respect and admiration for the sectarian community in return.

This brief discussion of my ethnographic experiences is the only place in this dissertation where I speak in an openly subjective voice. My first two chapters are not, in fact, primarily ethnographic in nature, and the two latter chapters, which do draw on my ethnographic research, are not, in my estimation, strengthened by the presence of my own subjective voice. In her work on storytelling traditions in India, Kirin Narayan argues that ethnographers should include personal narratives in their written accounts as the best way to expose one's strengths, weaknesses, and personal and scholarly commitments. Ethnography, she suggests, must be an "enactment of hybridity" that accounts for the everyday lives of scholars, as well as their scholarly lives.[39] While I do agree with this statement and believe that ethnographers can do this in extremely productive ways in their writing, I have not chosen to focus on my own ethnographic relationships in the

[39] This term is used by Kirin Narayan in her article: "How Native Is A 'Native' Anthropologist?," *American Anthropologist* 95, no. 3 (1993): 671-86. See also: Kirin Narayan, *Storytellers, Saints, and Scoundrels: Folk Narrative in Hindu Religious Teaching* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989).

following chapters.[40]

It should also be noted here that, in agreement with the terms of the University of Texas at Austin's Institutional Review Board, individuals with whom I interacted during ethnographic research have been given pseudonyms except in the case of sectarian leaders and public figures (e.g., published authors).

V. Chapter Outline

The primary purpose of this dissertation is to understand the enduring significance of the *vārtā*s and to analyze the ways in which these texts have continued to inform the religious and social lives of modern devotees. Through various interventions of early commentators and latter-day discussants the *vārtā*s, I argue, have served as a continuous forum in which worldly and spiritual matters can be allowed to co-exist within individual lives and in which sectarian identities are continuously (re)articulated.

In Chapter One I introduce the genre of *Vārtā Sāhitya* (*Vārtā* Literature) and discuss the aesthetically distinct ways in which this literature presents sectarian history, canon, theology, ritual practice, and devotional and social relationships. In so doing, I explain how the hagiographies relate to the larger canon of sectarian literature, including the major Sanskrit treatises of Vallabhacharya. In the second portion of the chapter I focus on how specific *vārtā*s and their early commentaries exhibit, both in structure and

[40] For examples of works in which scholars have written about or performed this hybridity or polyvocality exceptionally well, see: Kathleen Stewart, *Ordinary Affects* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007); Ann Grodzins Gold, *A Carnival of Parting: The Tales of King Bharthari and King Gopi Chand as Sung and Told by Madhu Natisar Nath of Ghatiyali, Rajasthan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992); Ann Grodzins Gold and Bhoju Ram Gujar, *In the Time of Trees and Sorrows: Nature, Power, and Memory in Rajasthan* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002).

content, the ways in which these texts' authors and redactors were in active dialogue with each other, with other texts, and with their intended audiences. The *vārtā* hagiographies are thus dialogic texts, which inspire readers to engage in ongoing discussion and debate.

The second chapter considers how the *vārtā*s were significant to the changing identity of the Vallabh Sampraday during the latter half of the nineteenth century. I begin by looking at how the scriptural authority of the vernacular hagiographies and their representation of the sect were called into question during an 1862 Supreme Court case, which was also related to broader nineteenth-century debates over what constituted "authentic" Hinduism. Some scholars have argued that this court case and the events that followed marked the beginning of a decline in the community. I reject this claim and show how one of the ways in which devotees demonstrated resilience and worked to reassert sectarian identity was through a re-articulation of the *sampradāy*'s hagiographic literature. This re-articulation worked in different ways, but often focused on historicizing and thereby culturally re-authorizing hagiography through rhetorical devices in written commentaries on the *vārtā*s. One of the factors, practically speaking, that allowed for this cultural re-authorization was the commercialization of the printing press and the presentation of the *vārtā*s as published books.

Focusing on the contemporary context, Chapter Three continues to address how members of the *sampradāy* discuss changing social circumstances and sectarian relationships through reading and interpreting *Vārtā Sāhitya*. Two particular issues seem to motivate a majority of debates: 1) the question of contemporary patronage—that is, the donation of lay devotees' personal wealth to the temples that house sectarian deities; and

2) the proper use of places of worship. Should the *havelī* ("temple") be a place of public worship for lay devotees, or is it a strictly private home for a Krishna *svarūp* and his immediate caretakers (descendants of Vallabhacharya)? Who is supposed to care for the *svarūp*s enshrined in *havelī*s, and how? How does the care of temple *svarūp*s relate to the care of *svarūp*s kept in devotees' private homes? In this chapter I focus on how these questions are negotiated through the practice of scriptural debate and textual commentary. Underlying these debates, I argue, are not only negotiations of religious and scriptural authority, but also negotiations of what it means to live as a member of the Vallabh Sampraday in today's urban Gujarat—and, more broadly, in a rapidly changing modern world.

The fourth and final chapter considers the practice of reading and orally discussing the hagiographies in Ahmedabad city. Like the commentaries and scriptural debates considered in Chapter Three, ritualized reading and oral exegesis of the *vārtā*s can touch on major debates within the *sampradāy* that relate to matters such as sectarian leadership or the proper use *havelī*s as public or private spaces. However, as shown throughout this chapter, discourse during group readings frequently attends to the more intimate and private negotiations of individual devotees' everyday lives and devotional practices. Accordingly, the central question of this chapter is: how do readers of the *vārtā*s imagine and express their social and devotional worlds through the performative practices of group reading and oral commentary? In addressing this question, the chapter describes the various contexts and ways in which the *vārtā*s are read by different groups of devotees and religious leaders. After giving a general typology of reading groups in

Ahmedabad city, I focus on key issues that arise in the context of three distinct groups that I visited regularly over the course of twelve months. What these examples from my ethnographic archive demand of us theoretically, I argue, is a reconsideration of what "reading" is, how it functions, and what it means to read religiously.

Chapter I

Vārtā Sāhitya: Canon, Genre, and Aesthetics

Introduction

Within the larger canon of literature specific to the Vallabh Sampraday, the Braj Bhasha *vārtā*s occupy a very specific place for readers, both historically and in the contemporary context. Amidst a largely Sanskrit-based literary canon, including the theological treatises written by the sect's first two preceptors Vallabhacharya (1479-1531) and Vitthalnath (1515-1585), the vernacular *vārtā*s stand out for their aesthetically distinct syntheses of the *sampradāy*'s history, theology, and social and devotional expressions. In other words, the *vārtā*s provide readers with a potential guide to orthodoxy and orthopraxy, and hence to sectarian belonging. However, as I aim to flesh out in the course of this study, interpretations of correct thought and practice are ever fluid and even contradictory, both within the *vārtā*s themselves and also in the many layers of written and oral commentary that surround the narratives. As we will see, the issues that arise from reading and discussing the hagiographies range from questions of theological and historical interpretation, to questions of temple renovation, ritual practice, patronage, sectarian authority, diet, gender roles, and familial and domestic decorum. Regardless of which issues are up for debate, all matters that emerge from discussing the *vārtā*s point toward the process that devotees go through in order to continuously (re)negotiate between scriptural ideals inherited from the past and realities of the present. Robin Rinehart has observed that hagiography at its most essential level is "the history of how the saint's followers have chosen to remember him or her," and therefore that the job

of hagiographers is to "serve as mediators, creating a bridge between the saint and his followers through their texts."[1] This dissertation builds on this definition, but argues that all *vārtā* readers necessarily become hagiographers in their own right: chronicling not only the ways in which they experience "the saint as a saint," but also the ways in which they experience themselves as individuals in relationship to others, both human and divine.

Although this dissertation focuses on the various ways in which the *vārtā*s have been received over time, I also maintain that the physical texts themselves are essential and dynamic contexts for understanding how the hagiographies have been read and interpreted by both premodern and modern devotees. *Vārtā* literature, like any literary genre, has its own unique "ecology," or "literary grammar."[2] Accordingly, the purpose of this first chapter is to describe the distinct literary grammar of the *vārtā*s, and more broadly to understand the larger sectarian canon of which these texts are a part. Only in doing this can we make sense of why modern readers approach the texts as they do.

The first part of this chapter provides a brief introduction to the *sampradāy*'s literary canon at large, focusing on the major Sanskrit treatises attributed to Vallabhacharya and the ways in which these early sectarian texts interact with and inform the *vārtā*s. Next, I turn to *Vārtā Sāhitya* specifically—enumerating the texts that

[1] Robin Rinehart, *One Lifetime, Many Lives: The Experience of Modern Hindu Hagiography* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1999), 11-12.

[2] For a discussion of "literary ecology," see: A.K. Ramanujan, "On Translating a Tamil Poem," in *The Collected Essays of A.K. Ramanujan*, edited by Vinay Dharwadker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 198. For a discussion of "literary grammar," particularly of oral poetic traditions, see: John M. Foley, *How to Read an Oral Poem* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 86.

constitute the *vārtā* canon, describing their textual histories, and outlining how these texts contribute to the *sampradāy*'s own understanding of its history, religious hierarchies and leadership, theology, and social and devotional outlook. Finally, I analyze the two *vārtā* texts that feature most prominently throughout the latter chapters of this dissertation: the *Caurāsī Vaiṣṇavan kī Vārtā* and the *Do Sau Bāvan Vaiṣṇavan kī Vārtā* ("Chronicles of Eighty-Four Vaishnavas" and "Chronicles of Two Hundred and Fifty-Two Vaishnavas" respectively). The first text recounts the lives of devotees initiated into the fold by Vallabhacharya himself, while the second offers narratives of the disciples initiated by his successor Vitthalnath. In this section I consider essential characteristics of the *Caurāsī Vaiṣṇavan kī Vārtā* and the *Do Sau Bāvan Vaiṣṇavan kī Vārtā* (hereafter *84VV* and *252VV*), particularly with respect to how the narratives portray devotional relationships, ritual practice, and social behavior. Finally, I explore some of the rhetorical strategies and narrative conventions used by the texts' authors and redactors to interpret, synthesize, and add to Vallabhacharya's teachings.[3] The texts' distinct aesthetics and literary features, I argue, help to explain what kind of readers engage with the *84VV* and *252VV* and why these texts continue to be so popular today.

[3] Tony K. Stewart rightly suggests that any readings that attempt to understand hagiographies must bear in mind the "theological assertions, the rhetorical strategies, and the traditional narrative conventions of the genre […]" (*The Final Word*, 13).

Part I: *Śuddhādvaita* Philosophy Through Vallabhacharya's Primary Sanskrit Works

The hagiographies of the Vallabh Sampraday are highly intertextual, positioning themselves in relationship to each other and to other major texts in the sectarian canon.[4] In the opening paragraphs of popular versions of the *84VV*, the most self-referential and intertextual of all the *vārtā*s, the narrator asserts the text's position and purpose *as a text*:

> One day, Shri Gokulnathji was discussing the eighty-four Vaishnavas with Kalyan Bhatt and some other devotees. By midnight he still hadn't begun his daily recitation of the *Subodhinī*. Then, a devotee said to Shri Gokulnathji: "My Lord, when will you begin the recitation? It is already midnight!" Then, Shri Gokulnathji said: "Today the fruits of my recitation will be known through a discussion of the [eighty-four] Vaishnavas. There is no principle superior to the Vaishnavas and it is by means of the Vaishnavas that [our path] will come to fruition…[5]

In this oft-cited episode, Gokulnath (1551-1640), Vallabhacharya's grandson, is recounting the life-stories of Vallabhacharya's beloved disciples.[6] One of the devotees who is listening to the storytelling inquires as to why Gokulnath has not yet read from the *Subodhinī* ("That which is Greatly Enlightening"), Vallabhacharya's commentary on the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* (hereafter *BhP*). This commentary, as we will soon consider, is described both in the hagiographies and in popular discourse as Vallabhacharya's most defining work. In the quoted episode, Gokulnath, who is also the assumed oral author of the *84VV*, asserts that his recitation of the *Subodhinī* will be "known through a discussion

[4] For a comprehensive study of "intertextuality," see: Allen Graham, *Intertextuality* (New York: Routledge, 2011).

[5] Dvārkādās Puruṣottamdās Parīkh, ed., *Caurāsī Vaiṣṇavan kī Vārtā (Tīn Janma kī Līlā Bhāvnā Vālī*) (Indore: Vaiṣṇav Mitra Maṇḍal, 2011), 1-2.

[6] Gokulnath's lifespan varies in hagiographical sources—occasionally it is 1551-1647, rather than 1551-1640 CE.

of the [eighty-four] Vaishnavas." In saying this Gokulnath employs a familiar rhetorical flourish by claiming that the *84VV* offers the essence of the *Subodhinī*, a text that describes the essence of the *BhP,* which itself describes the essence of Krishna as Supreme Being. Further, Gokulnath asserts, it is through the narratives themselves that "[our path] will come to fruition." In other words, the *84VV* claims itself to be what Anne Blackburn has called a "practical canon," that is, the texts that are actually employed in the practices of reading, commenting on, listening to, and "preaching sermons."[7] This self-referential assertion of functional authority is by no means unique, but it is, in this case, rather accurate in terms of contemporary practice. While the Sanskrit commentaries and treatises composed by Vallabhacharya and Vitthalnath do continue to be read and commented on in Sanskrit and vernacular languages (Hindi and Gujarati), the vast majority of contemporary devotees know these texts through the *vārtā*s' vernacular synthesis. We might even consider the *vārtā*s to function not only as syntheses of, but also as commentaries on what the tradition asserts to be its primary or "formal" canon.[8] The *vārtā*s do not, however, simply replace the "formal canon." Instead, as we will see here and in later chapters, the hagiographies have always had intimate and dynamic relationships with their Sanskrit counterparts—particularly the three texts, or sets of texts, that I highlight below.

[7] Anne Blackburn, "Looking for the Vinaya: Monastic Discipline in the Practical Canons of the Theravada," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 22, no. 2 (1999): 284.

[8] Ibid., 284.

I a. Vallabhacharya's *Subodhinī* commentary on the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*

Vallabhacharya was an orthodox Brahmin who accepted that the *Veda*s, or *śruti*, were the unquestionably valid expressions of Truth.[9] Also according to orthodox Brahminical thought, Vallabhacharya asserted that the era in which he lived was that of the disastrous *kaliyuga*, an era in which humans could no longer comprehend the truth of the *Veda*s. Vallabhacharya maintained that *parabrāhmaṇa*, the Supreme Being, had however revealed himself on earth as Lord Krishna in order to restore and protect righteousness during this demonic age. For Vaishnava theologians of Vallabhacharya's time, and still for countless devotees across the Hindu spectrum, the most popular record of Krishna's manifestation on earth is told in the *BhP*.[10]

The *vārtā*s describe the theologian's passion for the *BhP* as central not only to his theological writings, but also to his proselytizing pilgrimages and modes of religious instruction. The Braj Bhasha *Caurāsī Baiṭhak Caritra* ("The Account of Eighty-Four Seats"), for instance, describes eighty-four of the primary places where Vallabhacharya read and commented upon the *BhP*, transforming the lives of those who heard him. It is therefore no surprise that Vallabhacharya's most widely known composition is his *Subodhinī* commentary on the *BhP*.[11] Vallabhacharya's *Subodhinī* highlights Book Ten of the *BhP*, which establishes Krishna as Supreme Being and describes the deity's *līlā* with the *gopī*s and *gopa*s ("cowherd maidens" and "cowherds") in the land of Braj.

[9] *Śruti* refers to divine revelation (namely the *Veda*s), which has been passed down orally.

[10] Bryant, *Krishna: The Beautiful Legend of God*, xvi.

[11] I have relied on Redington's translation of the text in this summary (Redington, *Śrīsubodhinī*).

Krishna's *rāsa-līlā*, or dramatic enactment of amorous play with the *gopī*s, is famously described in a five-part section of the *BhP*'s tenth book known as the *Rāsapañcādhyāyī*.

One of the *Subodhinī*'s primary concerns is to apply concepts borrowed from Sanskrit aesthetic theory, known as *rasa* theory, to explain how Krishna's *rāsa-līlā* becomes a model for the proper cultivation of the devotee's love for the divine. *Rasa* (lit. "juice" or "essence") is generally understood as distilled aesthetic emotion that arises when mundane feelings are depersonalized and transcend their historical contexts.[12] Sanskrit theoreticians writing on *rasa* selected eight *sthāyībhāva*s ("stable feelings") from the gamut of human emotions for the dramatic representation of life on stage or in literature.[13] Early *rasa* theoreticians described how through a "rigorously specified compositional process," these emotions could be "metamorphosed into corresponding dominant moods or emotions (*rasa*s)."[14] These *rasa*s include *śṛṅgāra* ("erotic"), *hāsya* ("comic"), *karuṇa* ("tragic"), *raudra* ("furious"), *bhayānaka* ("fearsome"), *vīra* ("heroic"), *bībhatsa* ("disgusting"), and *adbhuta* ("wondrous").[15] Later philosophers,

[12] *Rāsa* should be clearly distinguished from *rasa*. According to McGregor, the former means: "a dance of cowherds" or "specif. the round-dance of Kṛṣṇa with the herd-girls of Braj"; "a Kṛṣṇa festival including enactment of the round-dance, celebrated in the month of Kārttik"; "a type of popular drama dealing with the exploits of Kṛṣṇa" (McGregor, *The Oxford Hindi-English Dictionary*, 863). *Rasa* can mean: "juice, sap; liquid; liquor"; "flavor"; "pleasure; joy; elegance, charm, wit" (Ibid., 855).

[13] These emotions include: love, joy, grief, fear, energy, disgust, and wonder.

[14] Prasad, *Ethics in Everyday Hindu Life*, 174.

[15] One of the first texts to theorize *rasa* is the *Nāṭyaśāstra*—a Sanskrit treatise on drama likely composed between 200 BCE and 200 CE. For further on this text, see: Adya Rangacharya, ed. and trans., *The Nāṭyaśāstra: English Translation with Critical Notes* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharala, 1996).

namely Anandavardhana (c. 850) and Abhinavagupta (fl. c. 975-1025), would add a ninth *rasa*, *śanta* ("peace") to this list.

While *bhakti* was considered an aesthetic category prior to the sixteenth century, it was during this period that theologians most successfully popularized the use of *rasa* theory to delineate the *bhāva*s ("moods") of *bhakti*. Vallabhacharya's *Subodhinī* suggests that Krishna is the divine embodiment of *rasa*. In Vallabhacharya's view, as in other popular Vaishnava accounts, experiencing Krishna as the embodiment of *rasa* (namely *śṛṅgāra rasa*) becomes the primary goal of the *gopī* (the metaphoric human devotee), who, like the *sahṛdaya* ("cultivated viewer" or reader of poetry or drama), reaches her goal when the *rāsa-līlā* is performed with all the requisite *bhāva*s.[16] While Vallabhacharya's account of how to experience *bhakti rasa* is not as clearly delineated as some of his near contemporaries (e.g., Rupa Gosvamin of the Gaudiya Sampraday), his work contributes to the discourse on how the human devotee can, through the establishment of ritual techniques, imitate and thus come to actually inhabit the world of Krishna's *nitya līlā* ("eternal *līlā*") in the mundane world.[17]

Reverence for the *BhP*, as well as for the theological and aesthetic positions of the *Subodhinī*, remain central to sectarian teachings and have been interpreted in various ways over the past several centuries. In the latter half of this chapter we will see how

[16] The *bhāva*s delineated in the *BhP* and adopted by *bhakti* sects include: *dāsya* (the *bhāva* of "servitude"); *śānta* (the *bhāva* of "serenity"); *sakhya* (the *bhāva* of "friendship"); *mādhurya* (also known as *śṛṅgāra*, the *bhāva* of "sweetness" with reference to erotic intimacy); and *vātsalya* (the *bhāva* of "parental affection"). The Vallabh Sampraday is often assumed to prefer *vātsalya bhāva* because of the tradition's emphasis on domestic worship. According to Vallabhacharya's own writing, however, it is indeed *mādhurya bhāva* that is considered to be primary.

[17] For a comprehensive description of *bhakti rasa*, see: David L. Haberman, *Acting as a Way of Salvation: A Study of Rāgānugā Bhakti Sādhana* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1998).

early commentaries on the *84VV* and the *252VV* specifically refer to and draw on Vallabhacharya's reading of the *BhP* with respect to devotees' participation in *nitya līlā*.

I b. The *Anubhāṣya*

While less known by contemporary readers than his *Subodhinī*, Vallabhacharya's *Aṇubhāṣya* commentary (also known as the *Tattvasūtrabhāṣya*) on the *Brahmasūtra*s also establishes theological positions central to the *sampradāy* and is often cited in the *84VV* and *252VV*.[18] Like earlier Vedantists—including Shankara, Ramanuja, Madhva, and Nimbarka, who also commented on the *Brahmasūtra*s—Vallabhacharya used his commentary to establish his own distinct philosophical system, commonly referred to as *śuddhādvaita* ("Pure Non-Dualism").[19] The basic principle of Vallabhacharya's *śuddhādvaita* is that all of existence is subsumed by an undivided entity: *parabrāhmaṇa*, otherwise known as Brahman, whom Vallabhacharya realizes to be Krishna.[20] As highlighted in the Braj Bhasha hagiographies, Vallabhacharya's pure (*śuddha*) non-dualism (*a-dvaita*) is opposed to the philosophical systems of the aforementioned Vedantists, who claimed (according to the Vallabhites) that *jagat* (the "material world")

[18] For a recent edition of the text, see: Mūlcandra Tulsīdās Telīvālā, ed., *Brahmasūtrāṇubhāṣya* (Delhi: Akṣaya Prakāśitam, 2005).

[19] Vallabhacharya and many of his Vaishnava contemporaries were in conversation with similar texts and philosophies that are often collectively referred to as "Vedantic." *Vedānta* literally refers to the *upaniṣad*s, but by the ninth century had come to be associated with philosophical schools that were concerned with interpreting the *Upaniṣad*s, the *Vedāntasūtra*s (or the *Brahmasūtra*s), and the *Bhagavadgītā*. Vallabhacharya added the *BhP* as a fourth item to the *praṣthāna traya*, the three traditional primary scriptures used by Vedantic sects to establish their own authenticity. Vallabhacharya was not, however, the first theologian to write on non-dualism. One of many examples of similar sentiments can be found in the forty-first *sūtra* of the *Nārada Bhaktisūtra*s: "There is no feeling of difference in that [Supreme Being] and in the person [devoted to him]" (Barz, *The Bhakti Sect of Vallabhācārya*, 64).

[20] Redington, *The Grace of Lord Krishna*, 26.

is an illusion accounted for by *māyā*—a deceptive and indefinable force with the power to obscure human perception of *jagat* and Brahman as unified. As we find in the *vārtā*s, Vedantists who are perceived to hold this view of *māyā* are referred to disparagingly as *māyāvādī*s. Vallabhacharya claimed that *māyāvādī*s' belief in *māyā* could also limit one's ability to have faith in Brahman as omnipresent, omnipotent, and omniscient—and as "*sat, citt*, and *ānanda*" ("simple existence, awareness, and joy").[21] According to Vallabhacharya, Krishna causes *jagat* to be manifest as a limited, but real, part of himself through the medium of *māyāśakti* ("illusory power"). This *māyāśakti* is under Krishna's control and is therefore a natural part of his *līlā*.[22]

I c. Philosophical keys in the *Soḍaśagrantha*

Central to this ontological framework is Vallabhacharya's understanding of the *jīva* (the human "soul"). Just as the physical world is the manifestation of *sat* (the "simple existence" of Krishna), *jīva*s are considered to be the manifestation of Krishna's *citt* ("awareness"). What of the Krishna's third quality—*ānanda*? According to Vallabhacharya's teachings, *ānanda* is naturally *tirobhūta* ("concealed") from *jīva*s who are therefore not easily able to experience Krishna, of whom they are a natural part. As the concept has been explained to me, *jīva*s are to Krishna as sparks are to fire. It is no coincidence then, that Vallabhacharya's hagiographers (writing in Braj Bhasha) describe

[21] Harishankar Onkar Shastri, ed., *Tattvārtha Dīpa Nibandha with Prakāśa* (Bombay: Trustees of Sheth Narayandas, 1943), 5 (verse 65).

[22] In yet another commentary (in part on the *Bhagavadgītā*), called the *Tattvārthadīpanibandha*, which builds on the *Aṇubhāṣya*, Vallabhacharya writes: "[Krishna] is the material cause of the Universe, and is its efficient cause. Sometimes it indulges in self-sport and sometimes in the Universe" (Barz, *The Bhakti Sect of Vallabhācārya*, 30). For further on this text, see: Jeffrey Richard Timm, "God, Language, and Revelation: The "*Tattvārthadīpanibandha*" of Vallabhacharya" (PhD diss., Temple University, 1985).

him as *agnisvarūp* (a "manifestation of fire"). The preceptor is also known as the *mukhāvatār*, or the "manifestation" of Krishna's *mukh*, or "mouth." Accordingly, hagiographic tradition explains how Vallabhacharya was manifest on earth to help in the *uddhār* ("uplifting") and subsequent *aṅgīkār* ("acceptance") of select souls so that their *avidyā* ("ignorance") could be rectified. Indeed, according to Vallabhacharya's own writing, all souls are impure (with *doṣa*s, "faults" or "defects"), which is what keeps them unaware of Krishna's *ānanda*. Thus, the first step in recognizing union with Krishna is a process of purification.

While Vallabhacharya never says so explicitly, the Braj Bhasha hagiographic tradition that grew around him claims not only that the theologian was manifest in the world to assist in uplifting souls, making them fit for Krishna's *anugrah* ("grace"), but also that Vallabhacharya and his direct male descendants are the *only* mediums through which the necessary cleansing of impurities can occur. What Vallabhacharya does write, however, and what is recounted and elaborated on in the first *vārtā* of the *84VV*, is that Krishna himself appeared and spoke to the preceptor on the issue of cleansing souls. This encounter appears in Vallabhacharya's brief Sanskrit treatise, the *Siddhāntarahasyam*, which is the fifth of sixteen short texts in an anthology called the *Ṣoḍaśagrantha*.[23] The *Siddhāntarahasyam* describes the divine encounter as follows:

śrāvaṇasyāmale pakṣe ekādaśyām mahāniśi /
sākṣādbhagavatā proktaim tadakṣaraśa ucyate //1//

[23] It should be noted that scholars working on the Sanskrit canon do not see evidence that Vallabhacharya himself compiled his "Sixteen Works" in the order in which they are circulated today. According to Shyam Manohar Goswami, this anthologizing likely occurred over nearly a century as commentators redacted and interpreted the texts (Personal Communication, July 23rd, 2012).

At midnight on the eleventh day of *śravana*'s bright half,
The Blessed Lord Himself appeared before my eyes.
And what He proclaimed to me then I repeat here, word for word.[24]

In the following seven and one-half verses of the treatise, Vallabhacharya recounts Krishna's description of how the *jīva* must remove physical and mental *doṣa*s through the *brahmasambandha*—an initiation that binds the soul to Brahman as Krishna. In essence, the ceremony dedicates all things (of mind, body, and physical matter) to Krishna. By doing so "all become Brahman" (*tatha kāryaṁ samarpaiva sarveṣāṁ brahmatā tataḥ*) and, "just as all faulty things become Ganges (upon entering it), and just as it is relevant to discuss their virtues, defects and so forth before they enter the Ganges, but not after, the case is precisely the same here."[25]

The *vārtā*s elaborate on the account from the *Siddhāntarahasyam*, adding that Krishna's divine appearance occurred while Vallabhacharya was on pilgrimage to the village of Gokul (in Braj). Further, the *vārtā*s report, Vallabhacharya and his devoted companion Damodardas Harsani (whose *vārtā* is the first account in the *84VV*) had stayed awake to read the *BhP* at Govind Ghat (in Braj) in accordance with the monthly eleventh-day *ekādaśī* observance.[26] While reading, Vallabhacharya became worried about how impure souls could ever be joined with the pure Lord Krishna. Krishna, aware of this concern, physically appears and asks why the *ācārya* is worried: *tum cintātur kyoṁ ho?* ("Why are you worried?). When Vallabhacharya explains the reason for his concern, the

[24] Redington, *The Grace of Lord Krishna*, 64.

[25] Redington, *The Grace of Lord Krishna*, 65.

[26] *Ekādaśī* marks the eleventh day of a lunar fortnight in the Hindu calendar.

deity replies: *jīv ko nām deuge tinke sakal doṣ nivṛtt hoiṅge, tāteṁ jīvan koṁ aṅgīkār karo* ("Give souls the Name and all impurities will be released. Then accept (*aṅgīkār*) them [into the fold]").[27] By having Krishna explicitly command that Vallabhacharya perform initiation, the *vārtā* dialogue builds upon Vallabhacharya's own telling of the event in the *Siddhāntarahasyam* (where such explicit direction is absent).

A common designation for the Vallabh Sampraday is the *puṣṭimārg*, or the "Path of Nourishment" (hereafter, the Pushtimarg).[28] The term was used by Vallabhacharya himself and first appears in the *Siddhāntamuktāvalī*, also included in the *Ṣoḍaśagrantha* anthology.[29] The *Siddhāntamuktāvalī* establishes the theologian's firm assertion that the Pushtimarg is superior to the path of *jñāna* ("knowledge"). Once the devotee receives initiation, he or she is to focus on the *sevā* ("loving service") of Krishna, with body, wealth, and mind. True to his concise writing style, Vallabhacharya does not fully describe physical practices of *sevā*—an issue taken up in later commentaries on the *Siddhāntamuktāvalī* and other texts. Because of his limited description of *sevā*, many

[27] Parīkh, *Caurāsī Vaiṣṇavan kī Vārtā* (2011)*,* 5. This dialogue, exchanged in the *vārtā* narrative itself, is embellished by Hariray's commentary in the *Bhāvprakāś* portion of the text, which says: *Śrī Ācāryājī koṃ vacan diye haiṃ, jākoṁ brahmasambandh hoigo, takoṁ na choḍenge*. "[Krishna] gave his word to Acharyaji: 'I will not abandon those who have the *brahmasambandh*'" (Ibid). The *nām* ("Name"), or *nām nivedan*, refers to the first part of sectarian initiation. The *nām mantra* consists of the phrase *Śrī Kṛṣṇaḥ śaraṇam mama* ("Shri Krishna is my refuge"), after which the devotee receives a *mālā* ("necklace") made from *tulsī* wood. Preparing for the *brahmasambandh*, or the second part of the initiation, requires various rituals, including fasting for one day, bathing, and wearing new garments. This is how many sectarian texts describe the process of initiation and is still (more or less) how it continues to be performed today. The process is explained in: Barz, *The Bhakti Sect of Vallabhācārya*, 18-21.

[28] When describing something that is specific to the *puṣṭimārg* I will use the adjective *puṣṭimārgīy*. ईय (*īy*) is a suffix that forms adjectives in many Indic languages, so *puṣṭimārgīy* refers to that which is of (or pertaining to) the *puṣṭimārg*.

[29] Redington, *The Grace of Lord Krishna,* 31.

contemporary commentators assert that the *vārtā*s contain the most accurate descriptions of how ritual worship was performed in the early community (discussed in Chapter Three).

Regardless of what his use of the term *sevā* may or may not have referred to in terms of ritual practice, Vallabhacharya asserted that the spiritual advancement of the devotee was not ultimately dependent on *guru* or devotee, but rather on the grace (*anugraha*) of Krishna. Devotees who did advance in their relationship with Krishna through *sevā* would find that their love for the deity became *vyasana* ("obsessive") and that attachment to Krishna would become overwhelming.[30] This state of obsessive devotion would be followed by the *nirodha* ("bondage") of the devotee in such a way that he or she could subsist on Krishna's grace alone.[31]

While the *vārtā*s often highlight the Pushtimarg as the only path by which one can reach Krishna, Vallabhacharya acknowledged and openly discussed the possibility that other spiritual paths—however misguided and inefficient—could bring souls back into knowing union with Krishna. According to Vallabhacharya, just as there are various spiritual paths there are also various types of souls. While in essence all *jīva*s are fundamentally equal (all being part of Krishna), they differ in character because of their various roles in Krishna's *līlā*. *Jīva*s and their corresponding spiritual paths fall into three categories, which are outlined in another brief treatise from the *Ṣoḍaśagrantha* called the

[30] See verses 3-5 of the *Bhaktivardhinī* in: Redington, *The Grace of Lord Krishna*, 125-126.

[31] Redington, *The Grace of Lord Krishna,* 177-81; 160–63. For further on the concept of *nirodha*, see: Smith, "*Nirodha* and the *Nirodhalakṣāṇa* of Vallabhācārya."

Puṣṭipravāhamaryādābheda.[32] First and foremost there are the *puṣṭi jīva*s, those "nourished" souls who are most likely to receive Krishna's grace. Second are *maryādā* ("rule-bound") *jīva*s, whose ritual performances are limited to injunctions prescribed in the *Veda*s. The third type of *jīva* is described as *pravāha*, or trapped in the "current" of continuous action.[33] All *puṣṭi jīva*s are considered to be *daiva jīva*s ("godly beings").[34] As we will explore in the latter portion of this chapter, all of the protagonists from the *84VV*, the *252VV*, and other *vārtā* texts are "godly beings." Other figures, however, including family members or friends of protagonists, may fall into the *maryādā* or even *pravāha* category of souls.

Thus far, we have concentrated on theological matters in Vallabhacharya's writing, but the theologian also had much to say on the social lives of his followers. While Vallabhacharya accepted the *varṇāśramadharma* system, which accounted for renunciation as the final of four commonly recognized stages of the human life, he firmly emphasized the primacy of a householder lifestyle. According to the hagiographic tradition, Krishna commanded that Vallabhacharya himself marry and raise a family. It was only in his final days of life, according to the *vārtā*s, that the theologian renounced the material world and immediately became absorbed into Krishna.[35] Vallabhacharya

[32] For further on this text, see: Smith, "Predestination and Hierarchy: Vallabhācārya's Discourse on the Distinctions Between Blessed, Rule-bound, Worldly, and Wayward Souls: the *Puṣṭipravāhāmaryādābheda*."

[33] Redington, *The Grace of Lord Krishna*, 44.

[34] In the Braj Bhasha *vārtā*s the spelling is *daivī jīv*.

[35] For a discussion of Vallabhacharya's own renunciation, see: Redington, "The Last Days of Vallabhacarya."

wrote about his position on the matter of renunciation in several places, but most clearly in his *Saṃnyāsanirṇaya* treatise of the *Ṣoḍaśagrantha*.[36] In the *Saṃnyāsanirṇaya*, Vallabhacharya reiterates that while all mental and physical attributes should be fully *samarpit* ("dedicated") to Krishna, one should not live removed from the social world. Why? Because, in the *kaliyuga*, traditional forms of renunciation lead to pride and egotism rather than to *bhakti*. If a devotee's relations become *bādhaka* ("obstacles") to his path, then he should consider removing himself from his family. However, "there is no way to avoid contact with such people even after renouncing […] and so, in this *yuga* and at this stage of practice on the *bhaktimārga*, renunciation does not bring happiness (*sukhā*)."[37] As we will see throughout this study, the theme of negotiating between a householder lifestyle and performances of *sevā* is frequently discussed by both the *vārtā*s' protagonists and by modern devotees for whom the *vārtā*s inform contemporary thought and practice.

In the following sections of this chapter I further elaborate on how the *vārtā*s' authors and commentators interpret and build upon these early textual expressions of sectarian theology. This is especially true of the treatises included in the *Ṣoḍaśagrantha*, an anthology that comes as close as we might imagine to a Sanskrit "handbook" for the *sampradāy*, and which is repeatedly cited in the *vārtā*s and in the commentarial tradition

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[36] For further on Vallabhacharya's views on renunciation, see: Smith, "The *Saṃnyāsanirṇayaḥ*: A Śuddhādvaita Text on Renunciation by Vallabhācārya." For further information on the general debates over renunciation in the medieval period, see: Patrick Olivelle, *Renunciation in Hinduism: A Medieval Debate* (Vienna: Institut fur Indologie der Universität Wien, 1986).

[37] Redington, *The Grace of Lord Krishna*, 160.

that surrounds the hagiographies. In this way, the *vārtā*s not only explain the origins of and provide practical narrative examples from these primary Sanskrit texts, but they also establish which texts are to be included in the sect's "formal" literary canon.[38] For example, both the *Subodhinī* and nearly all of the texts compiled in the *Ṣoḍaśagrantha* have origin stories in the *vārtā*s.[39]

[38] Although Vitthalnath (1515-1585) was of primary importance in the development and popularization of Vallabhacharya's philosophical system, I do not introduce texts attributed to Vitthalnath in this dissertation. Many of his written works are textual commentaries—often further commentaries on Vallabhacharya's own textual commentaries. Vitthalnath is also credited with the authorship of several popular Sanskrit praise poems in honor of his father, including the *Sarvottamstotra* ("The Supreme Hymn"), which recounts the auspiciously numbered one hundred and eight names of Vallabhacharya. Contemporary devotees regularly recite the *stotra*. While his contributions to the sectarian canon are not to be glossed over, Vitthalnath is particularly remembered for his administrative prowess (e.g., maintaining good relations with Mughal leaders) and for his further elaboration of the daily and seasonal practices involved in temple *sevā*. For further information on Vitthalnath's specific contributions to *sevā*, see: Monika Horstmann and Anand Mishra, "Vaishnava Sampradāyas on the Importance of Ritual: A Comparison of the Two Contemporaneous Approaches by Viṭṭhalnātha and Jīva Gosvāmī," in *Bhakti Beyond the Forest: Current Research of Early Modern Literatures in North India, 2003-2009*, edited by Imre Bangha (New Delhi: Manohar, 2012), 174-169. While I do not focus on the poetic works of the *sampradāy* in this study, the *84VV* and *252VV* also effectively canonize the work of the *aṣṭachāp*, whose compositions appear frequently in the prose hagiographies and continue to be integral to the sectarian liturgy today.

[39] For example, according to the *84VV*, Vallabhacharya composed the *Saṃnyāsanirṇaya* for one of his disciples, Narah Sannyasi, who was misguidedly on the path of renunciation until he realized the essence of the Pushtimarg and became a householder. Narah Sannyasi's *vārtā* normally appears as the seventy-second hagiography in the *84VV*.

Part II: *Vārtā Sāhitya*: Genre and Textual History

"Our *vārtā*s are like *purāṇ* and *itihās* combined: *je thayuṃ, eṭle itihās, je thaśe, ane je thāy che* ("what happened, that is, history, what will happen, and what continues to happen"). - Sumit Sharma[40]

Beginning in the seventeenth century, the texts that constitute today's canon of *Vārtā Sāhitya* were written and redacted in Braj Bhasha, the dominant vehicle for vernacular literature produced in many parts of northern India from the fifteenth to nineteenth centuries.[41] The rise and reign of Braj Bhasha as a literary language during this period of about four hundred years was closely associated with the Krishna-centered *bhakti* traditions that flourished in the Braj region during the sixteenth century.[42]

Braj Bhasha was also a popular choice for *bhakti* poets of the time because, however literary the language became, it was a vernacular language that was more accessible than Sanskrit to the common devotee. While both *rīti* ("courtly") and *bhakti* poets used Braj Bhasha to write what became a highly sophisticated body of poetic literature, prose writing in the language was considerably less common. With the possible exception of prose commentaries on poetic works, the earliest Braj Bhasha *vārtā*s from the mid-seventeenth century are the first extant examples of extended premodern prose

[40] Personal Communication, March 18th, 2012. Sumit Sharma's original comment was spoken in both Gujarati and English, reflected by the above translation.

[41] For more on Braj Bhasha and its cultural significance in premodern India, see: Snell, *The Hindi Classical Tradition,* 29-36.

[42] For an in depth study of Braj Bhasha in relation to *rīti* poetry, see: Allison Busch, *Poetry of Kings: The Classical Hindi Literature of Mughal India* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011). For a discussion of the relationship between *bhakti* and *rīti* Braj Bhasha poetry, see: Rupert Snell, "*Bhakti* versus *Rīti*? The *Satsaī* of Bihārīlāl," *Journal of Vaishnava Studies* 3, no. 1 (1994), 153-170.

compositions in Hindi. According to Richard K. Barz, the particular aesthetic of the prose in the *84VV* (the earliest *vārtā* text) influenced other prominent pieces of early Hindi prose writing, including Lallulal's (1763-1825) *Premsāgar* in Khari Boli ("current speech") Hindi. As Barz writes, both the *vārtā*s and the later *Premsāgar* share a "charmingly unsophisticated conversational style."[43] While the *vārtā*s are arguably unsophisticated in some aspects of their narrative composition—namely in their distinctly oral and conversational character—they are hardly unsophisticated in their intertextual references, theological and devotional expressions, or affective power.[44] While the final portion of this chapter will look more at the conversational style of the narratives, suffice it to say here that the *vārtā*s were both relatively unique in their form as original prose texts, but also participated in the widespread use of Braj Bhasha as a commonly accepted language of Vaishnavism in the region during the late-medieval period.[45] Although in modern Gujarat the *vārtā*s are often read in Gujarati translation, the status of Braj Bhasha as a language imbued with the qualities of Krishna devotion is still widely recognized.[46]

Today the *puṣṭimārgīy* canon of *Vārtā Sāhitya* is constituted by the following

[43] Barz, "The *Caurāsī Vaiṣṇavan kī Vārtā* and the Hagiography of the Puṣṭimārg," 45.

[44] Also, as McGregor reminds us, "the prose of the *vārtā* works is colloquial and unpretentious in style, and yet freely Sanskritised in vocabulary" (Ronald Stuart McGregor, *A History of Indian Literature: Hindi Literature from its Beginnings to the Nineteenth Century* (Wiesbaden: Harrossowitz, 1984), 210).

[45] By "original," I mean original compositions that were not commentaries on other texts.

[46] As I discuss further in Chapter Two, modern Gujarati does not travel very far from the Braj Bhasha of the *vārtā*s. Modern standard Hindi is in fact further from the language of the *vārtā*s than is modern standard Gujarati. It should also be noted that while Gujarati devotional poetry is sung alongside Braj compositions today, the original Braj Bhasha poems of the *aṣṭachāp* are never translated for the purpose of their ongoing devotional performances.

texts:

1. The *Caurāsī Vaiṣṇavan kī Vārtā* ("Chronicles of Eighty-Four Vaishnavas") and the *Do Sau Bāvan Vaiṣṇavan kī Vārtā* ("Chronicles of Two Hundred and Fifty-Two Vaishnavas");[47]

2. The *Bhāvsindhu* ("The Ocean of Devotion"), which offers extended accounts of certain characters from the *84VV* and *252VV*;

3. The *Gharu Vārtā* and the *Nij Vārtā* ("The Domestic Chronicle" and "The Intimate Chronicle") which focus on the life of Vallabhacharya and his immediate family;

4. The *Caurāsī Baiṭhak Caritra* ("The Account of Eighty-Four Seats"), which narrates Vallabhacharya's proselytizing pilgrimages to eighty-four different locations;

5. The *Śrī Ācāryajī* (or *Mahāprabhujī*) *kī Prākaṭya Vārtā* ("The Chronicle of the Manifestation of Ācāryajī"), which collects accounts of Vallabhacharya's life from earlier *vārtā* texts and reiterates them in one narrative of the theologian's life; and

6. The *Śrīnāthjī* (or *Śrī Govardhannāthjī*) *kī Prākaṭya Vārtā* ("The Chronicle of the Manifestation of Shrinathji"), which traces the early fifteenth-century emergence of Shrinathji in Braj and the deity's subsequent movement to Rajasthan during the seventeenth century.[48]

Collectively, the canon of *Vārtā Sāhitya* provides accounts of major events in sectarian history, a synthesis of and commentary on the theological texts and principles that were introduced in the first part of this chapter, and sacred biographies of members

[47] The significance of the number eighty-four is often linked to the notion that there are eighty-four *lakh* (84,000,000) categories of beings in the universe, or similarly that the average *jīv* passes through this number of births as plants and animals before being born in human form. Accordingly, eighty-four as an auspicious number is applied to many measurements, categories, and numbered items. It will then come as no surprise that the actual number of devotees whose lives are told in the *84VV* and *252VV* far exceeds three hundred and thirty-six. To get around this issue, the redactors of these texts included several accounts of difference devotees under the title of one, primary figure (e.g., the mother or father of an entire family of devotees).

[48] In addition to the *Prākaṭya Vārtā* of Shrinathji, there are many other such *prākaṭya* ("manifestation") narratives for other Krishna *svarūp*s, who, like Shrinathji, continue to be worshiped today.

of the Vallabh Kul, their disciples, and of primary deities. In so doing, the *vārtā*s also present a distinct theological and ritual system and a complex picture of the socio-cultural, moral, and devotional lives of the early community as seen through the lens of the hagiographies' authors. The underlying element of all of the *vārtā* texts, but particularly of the *84VV* and *252VV*, is that of how Krishna's *līlā* is manifest on earth—every thing that occurs in these narratives is considered to be a part of *līlā*, regardless of how seemingly mundane.

The diversity of the *vārtā* genre is matched by the complexity of the hagiographies' textual history. The only full-length study of the *vārtā*s' textual history, *Vārtā Sāhitya: Ek Vṛhat Adhyayan*, was completed in 1960 by Hariharnath Tandan. Tandan's study is comprehensive in many ways: he outlines each of the aforementioned texts' form and content and provides a useful summary of the *vārtā*s' place within the broader history of Hindi literature. His research on manuscript and printed editions of the *vārtā*s is, however, both dated and incomplete. This is not due to lack of solid research or analysis: tracking down the manuscripts of these texts is extraordinarily difficult as they are scattered among state, university, private institute, temple, and personal archives and are often in very poor condition. Accessing *vārtā* manuscripts is therefore an arduous task and could not easily have been accomplished by one individual. Since the work of Tandan, several scholars, including Charlotte Vaudeville, Richard K. Barz, John Stratton Hawley, and Ulrike Stark have followed up on textual histories of select *vārtā*s, namely the *84VV*, for different purposes.[49] My own limited manuscript and printed-edition study

[49] See: Vaudeville, *Myths, Saints and Legends*; Barz, *The Bhakti Sect of Vallabhācārya*; Hawley,

of the *84VV*, the *252VV*, and the *Śrīnāthjī kī Prākaṭya Vārtā* has shed further light on certain issues in the genre's textual history, but still leaves us with many uncertainties.

II a. The *Śrīnāthjī kī Prākaṭya Vārtā*

While it is likely one of the most recently redacted texts in the canon, the *Śrīnāthjī kī Prākaṭya Vārtā* comes chronologically first in terms of the sect's account of its own origins and its early development from the fifteenth through the seventeenth centuries. Furthermore, a discussion of the *Prākaṭya Vārtā*'s textual history is an apt way to introduce the social and political milieu(s) in which *vārtā* texts were first committed to writing.

In short, the *Śrīnāthjī kī Prākaṭya Vārtā* describes the emergence of the *sampradāy*'s foremost form of Krishna, Shrinathji, and his eventual movement from Braj to Nathdwara, Rajasthan. Most versions of the *Prākaṭya Vārtā* are broken into two distinct narrative sections. The first begins in *samvat* 1466 (1409 CE) at Govardhan Hill in Braj with the emergence of Shrinathji (a stone image of Krishna), and runs about a quarter of the way through the text until Vallabhacharya's death in *samvat* 1587 (1530 CE).[50] Beginning in 1409 CE and ending in 1479 CE, the emergence of Shrinathji is a slow process: first his raised arm emerges from the hillside, followed by his mouth, etc. The slowly emerging *svarūp* is discovered at Govardhan Hill by a family of local Braj residents, who are alerted by the peculiar behavior of their cow, whom they graze with

The Memory of Love; Ulrike Stark, *An Empire of Books: The Naval Kishore Press and the Diffusion of the Printed Word in Colonial India* (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2007).

[50] *Samvat* refers to Vikram Samvat, the founder of an era (still observed by Hindus, Jains, and other communities), which begins in 57 BC.

the rest of their herd on the sacred hill. As a form of the popular deity Krishna, Shrinathji is not surprisingly imagined in the *Prākaṭya Vārtā* as a benevolent prankster: he grants *manorath* ("wishes") to the farmers of Braj, but also steals their butter and drains their cows of milk as they graze. While unknown to the Braj residents, Vallabh Bhatt—a young Telugu Brahmin—is intrinsically connected to the emergence of the local deity. According to the *Prākaṭya Vārtā*, Vallabhacharya's own miraculous birth coincides with the emergence of Shrinathji's mouth, which is the text's explanation of why the *ācārya* is known as the *mukhāvatār* (the "manifestation of the mouth [of Krishna]").

In 1493 CE Vallabhacharya is called by Shrinathji to come to Braj in order to perform the deity's *sevā*. The Braj residents have done a loving job of caring for the deity, Shrinathji himself reports, but it is time for "proper service" to be established. What ensues is a series of episodes in which Vallabhacharya and his disciples take over the care and worship of Shrinathji and establish the nascent methods of *sevā* specific to the Pushtimarg.[51] According to the texts, this involved appointing Brahmin priests to feed the deity particular food items, as well as establishing *darśan* periods that occur at specified times throughout the day. During this portion of the narrative, Shrinathji himself becomes the primary protagonist, giving directions and commands to those who serve him. One of the deity's most memorable commands is his plea to Gusainji—as Vallabhacharya's son Vitthalnath (1515-1585) is referred to in the *vārtā*s—and Krishnadas Adhikari (the *śūdra* manager of Shrinathji's temple), to expel the Bengali

[51] Today both temple *sevā* and domestic *sevā* are quite different from what is described in the *vārtā*s. These differences and the history of the development of *sevā* are major issues that continue to be debated in the contemporary *puṣṭimārgīy* community in Gujarat. This is discussed in Chapter Three.

Brahmins whom Vallabhacharya had appointed to perform *sevā*.[52] The deity complains that his Bengali caretakers have stolen his *dravya* ("wealth") and have installed an image of the Goddess Vrinda beside his own hilltop shrine. While there are few details of the Bengalis' expulsion here, we know from a similar account in the *84VV* that Krishnadas becomes so riled up over the Bengalis' actions that he sets flame to their huts, forcibly driving them from their homes.[53]

The story of the Bengalis' expulsion is only one of many such stories that suggest community-based or sectarian conflict in the *vārtā*s. Throughout the narratives, the reader encounters episodes in which leaders and disciples of the sect come into conflict not only with Bengali Vaishnavas, but also with Muslims, ascetics, Jains, Brahmins, and, above all others, *māyāvādī*s. Although rarely as violent as Krishnadas Adhikari's burning of the Bengalis' huts, these community-based disputes in the *vārtā*s are clearly about the assertion of sectarian belonging, making firm the boundaries between "Us" and "Them." While community formation and sectarian belonging are not the exclusive topics of the *Prākaṭya Vārtā*, the larger *vārtā* canon, or of Indian hagiographies in general, these themes are indeed central to the genre of hagiography in many ways.[54]

Dispute over belonging and authority, however, also occurs with great frequency

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[52] Gusain (*gusāīṁ* or *gosāīṁ*) literally means "lord of cows" and is another form of the common designation *gosvāmī*. This honorary title is affixed to the names of religious leaders in the Vallabh Sampraday and also in other Vaishnava communities. In the sectarian context, however, Gusainji specifically refers to Vallabhacharya's son Vitthalnath. Adhikari (*adhikārī*) means "manager."

[53] There are several episodes, particularly from the first half of the *Prākaṭya Vārtā*, that are also found in the *Caurāsī Vaiṣṇavan kī Vārtā*, the earlier of the two texts. Occasionally the accounts vary in detail, but rarely in general significance.

[54] Heidi Pauwels, "Hagiography and Community Formation: The Case of a Lost Community of Sixteenth-Century Vrindāvan," *Journal of Hindu Studies* 3, no. 1 (2010): 53-90.

within the boundaries of the sect itself. As the second section of the *Prākaṭya Vārtā* illustrates, most internal disputes seem to have occurred between members the Vallabh Kul over issues of inheritance, leadership, and the care of Shrinathji and other primary Krishna *svarūp*s. When Vitthalnath died in 1585 CE he is said to have given equal spiritual leadership to each of his seven sons, who in turn passed on leadership through male primogeniture.[55] In the *Prākaṭya Vārtā*, familial disputes are most pronounced during the time of Vitthalnath's great-grandson, Vitthalray (1601-1655)—whose father was Damodar (1576-1640), and whose grandfather was Vitthalnath's eldest son Girdhar (1541-1621). About halfway through the *Prākaṭya Vārtā*'s narrative, Vitthalray begins to quarrel with his relatives over the care of Shrinathji. While ultimately the deity himself is shown to determine the outcomes of such familial tussles, another, perhaps unexpected character type, is responsible for resolving the dispute between Vitthalray and his family: the (unnamed) Mughal emperor.[56] The distressed Vitthalray explains to the *adhirāj* ("supreme monarch") that Shrinathji himself had appeared to him in a dream, saying:

> When Shri Gusainji was at Govardhan Hill, his seven sons stood before me and at that time Shri Gusainji said to me: "Whomever you are pleased with, have him do your *sevā*." At that time I took hold of Shri Girdharji's hand. Of all seven sons, Girdharji is the one who has the capacity […] Shri Girdharji [and his descendants—one of whom is Vitthalray] have the right to the main *sevā*.

[55] Vitthalnath's seven sons were named: Girdhar, Govindray, Balakrishna, Gokulnath, Raghunath, Yadunath, and Ghanashyam. Vitthalnath is said to have had four daughters who were named: Shobha, Yamuna, Shamla, and Devika. The descendants of these women often marry into the other lineages of the sect or into related Brahmin communities. Vitthalnath is also said to have had an adopted son, who appears as a character in the *252VV* and is named Tulsidas. Tulsidas' descendants are not generally recognized as legitimate heirs.

[56] Mughal emperors are often not given names in the *vārtā*s. We can guess that here the *vārtā* is referring to Jahangir or Shah Jahan.

According to the *vārtā*:

> The following day, just after Shrinathji had given instructions for the division of the *sevā* [to Vitthalray through the dream], the emperor issued a decree outlining the exact same agreement. Then the quarrel finally came to an end and Shri Vitthalray returned home.[57]

In this manner, the second half of the *Prākaṭya Vārtā* works to establish matters of inheritance and leadership and displays relatively positive relationships with political authorities (including the Mughals). Additionally, the latter part of the narrative also shows how the text's authors understood the changing political climate of the late seventeenth century—a climate which must have contributed to the internal climate of the *sampradāy* as well. Just as Shrinathji himself initiates the expulsion of the Bengalis from his *sevā*, he is also responsible for the political confusion that ultimately inspires his caretakers to move him from Govardhan Hill in Braj to the kingdom of Mewar, in today's state of Rajasthan. The story of exactly how Shrinathji incites such a shift is dramatic and complex—full of further dream sequences, miracles, a miraculously incited Mughal invasion, subsequent battles, and acts of passionate heroism and devotion.

What is notable here, however, is the ways in which the narrative alludes to the changing sources of patronage that the *sampradāy* relied on for financial support and physical protection (and for the resolving of disputes, as we have just seen). As the Mughal empire weakened, beginning with the reign of Aurangzeb (1658-1707), *puṣṭimārgīy* leaders—also in the midst of their own dynastic crisis—looked towards the relatively more secure kingdoms of Rajasthan for a new place to establish themselves and

[57] Viṣṇulāl Paṇḍyā, ed., *Śrī Govardhannāthjī ke Prākaṭya kī Vārtā* (Bombay: Śrī Veṅkaṭeśvar Press, 1905), 39-40.

their foremost deity. And so they did: although not without considerable dispute, Shrinathji continues to reside in the care of Girdhar's ancestors in the pilgrimage town of Nathdwara (the details of which we will revisit in Chapter Three).

The *Śrīnāthjī kī Prākaṭya Vārtā* is attributed to Hariray—the great-great grandson of Vallabhacharya and grandson of Govindray (1543-?), the second son of Vitthalnath. Hariray is somewhat of a "Vyas of the tradition"—numerous texts, both in Braj and Sanskrit, have been attributed to him and most of the *vārtā*s have his name on them.[58] He was originally from Gokul in Braj, but like many members of the Vallabh Kul, is said to have traveled to and lived in both Rajasthan and Gujarat, where *baiṭhak*s ("seats" or shrines) commemorate his auspicious visits. Notably he was also said to have spent time in the village of Nathdwara, where Shrinathji was eventually installed.[59]

If indeed Hariray was the author of the *Prākaṭya Vārtā*, then the second part of the narrative, which tells of Shrinathji's movement westward, would have been a near eye-witness account: according to traditional dates, Hariray lived from 1590-1715 CE! In this case, it seems relatively clear why the text was written and why it was written in the manner that it was: the *Prākaṭya Vārtā*, more than any other text in the *vārtā* genre, outlines sectarian history through the clear establishment of linear events. The text still shares much with its counterparts—it is written in colloquial Braj Bhasha prose and relies

[58] I am grateful to Heidi Pauwels for bringing these details to my attention. For further on Hariray, see: Heidi Pauwels and Emilia Bachrach, "Victims or Victory Mongers? The Multiple Lives of Krishna Images in Northern India," in *Religion, Conflict, and Accommodation in Indian History*, edited by Sudipta Kaviraj and Rajeev Bhargava (New York: Columbia University Press [2015]).

[59] Ibid.

on the sectarian logic of dreams, miracles, and divine control over all human characters' actions. However, the text also stands out for its use of dates, which appear over two dozen times in most versions of the narrative (normally about one hundred manuscript or seventy printed pages). Other *vārtā* texts rarely if ever include dates, and if they do so it is in order to highlight aspects of the ritual calendar (that is, season and time of day according to the lunar cycle) rather than to mark the year of an event. The presence of dates, then, highlights that one of the *Prākaṭya Vārtā*'s purposes is to establish sectarian genealogy and control over the Shrinathji deity, as well as to show successful relationships with political leaders (both Mughal and Rajput).

This trend of committing chronicles and genealogies to writing—whether in an effort to maintain legal rights over land, temples, deities, or political or religious authority—was not unique to the Vallabh Sampraday: many religious and political groups transcribed their oral records during the seventeenth century, if not before. While traditional *bāt* and *khyāt* Rajasthani "chronicles" grew as important (mostly oral) traditions before the well-known Rajput-Mughal alliances of the sixteenth century, these genres—like the related *vārtā* genre—became increasingly significant as a way in which Rajput leaders could maintain prestige and authority as members (*mansabdār*) of the Mughal court. Illustrious ancestry was of primary importance to all of the major Mughal emperors, but especially to Akbar (1556-1605) and to Aurangzeb (1658-1707). Aurangzeb himself struggled to take the throne after the death of his father, Shah Jahan (1628-1658). As Norman Ziegler writes with reference to the Rajasthani chronicle tradition: "the rise of this literature appears from one perspective to be an adaptive

response engendered by the need to re-interpret and re-emphasize [Rajput] values and ideals in a society responding to Muslim conquest and domination."[60] Alongside the Rajputs, I argue, the *puṣṭimārgīy* hagiographers (members of the Vallabh Kul or close disciples) also participated in this effort to record genealogies and foundational events in the formation of the sect.

While this socio-political milieu helps to explain why lineage holders of the Vallabh Sampraday would have put oral hagiographies into writing during the seventeenth century, the specific textual history of the *Śrīnāthjī kī Prākaṭya Vārtā* points towards another century of major conflict for the community—the nineteenth century. In the following chapter we will re-visit the contested textual history of the *Śrīnāthjī kī Prākaṭya Vārtā* and of other sectarian hagiographies. For now, suffice it to say that all of the primary *vārtā* texts grew out of traditions of oral storytelling that likely date back to the time of Vallabhacharya himself.

II b. The *Nij Vārtā*, the *Gharu Vārtā*, and the *Śrī Ācāryajī kī Prākaṭya Vārtā*

Before turning to the primary texts in the *vārtā* canon, the *84VV* and *252VV*, there are other distinct *vārtā* texts that should be briefly described, including the *Gharu Vārtā,* the *Nij Vārtā*, and the *Śrī Ācāryajī kī Prākaṭya Vārtā*. While these and other *vārtā* texts are said to have been edited by Hariray, many of the hagiographies are ultimately attributed to the oral accounts of Vitthalnath's fourth son, Gokulnath (1552-1640). The tradition recognizes Gokulnath as being the first member of the Vallabh Kul to have popularized the use of Braj Bhasha in oral storytelling and religious instruction. Sectarian

[60] Norman P. Ziegler, "The Seventeenth Century Chronicles of Mārvāṛa: A Study in the Evolution and Use of Oral Traditions in Western India," *History in Africa* 3 (1976): 135.

sources claim that Gokulanath's *vacanāmṛt* ("nectarous speech") relating to Vallabhacharya, Vitthalnath, and their disciples became the basis for Hariray's redaction of and commentaries on the *vārtā*s.[61] Similar to the *Śrīnāthjī kī Prākaṭya Vārtā*, the other texts that constitute the *vārtā* canon may not have been penned during the seventeenth century, as tradition would have it. Tandan writes that in his estimation the printed versions of the *Gharu Vārtā*, the *Nij Vārtā*, the *Śrī Ācāryajī kī Prākaṭya Vārtā*, and the *Baiṭhak Caritra* were written by nineteenth-century authors who had collected various accounts from earlier hagiographies (that is, the *84VV* and *252VV*).[62] The *Bhāvsindhu* receives the same assessment by Tandan: he only lists nineteenth- and twentieth-century printed editions.[63]

While all *vārtā* texts offer accounts of Vallabhacharya, either as a central or peripheral (yet always significant) character, the *Nij Vārtā,* the *Gharu Vārtā*, and the *Śrī Ācāryajī kī Prākaṭya Vārtā* focus specifically on the life of the theologian. Taking into account the larger world of South Asian sacred biographies, it might come as a surprise that Vallabhacharya's own hagiographies are not among the most popular *vārtā*s. These

[61] All oral accounts by members of the Vallabh Kul are referred to as *vacanāmṛt* ("nectarous speech").

[62] Ṭaṇḍan, *Vārtā Sāhitya*, 208.

[63] I have not discussed the *Bhāvsindhu* as it is a relatively minor text. Most versions contain fourteen *vārtā*s, which describe distinct moments from the lives of Vallabhacharya's and Vitthalnath's disciples. Half of these figures appear in the *84VV* and *252VV*, and the other half seem to be entirely distinct characters. In the case of the characters that do appear in the *84VV* and *252VV*, the *Bhāvsindhu* seems to be concerned with offering further details about the *laukik* ("worldly") lives of the protagonists (e.g., birth place, caste, and occupation). Accordingly, we can count the *Bhāvsindhu* as one of several iterations of commentary that was added to earlier *vārtā* narratives in an effort to provide what was considered to have been pertinent information about devotees' lives.

texts do circulate and continue to be printed, but often as appendixes to other texts, including the *Baiṭhak Caritra*, which will be introduced next. As Sumit Sharma, one of my primary conversation partners in Ahmedabad, told me while preparing for a three-day long *pravacan* ("sermon") on the life of Vallabhacharya: "there is not one text that tells the full life of our Shri Mahaprabhuji—all *vārtā* texts, as well the *Vallabhadigvijaya* [a Sanskrit text that I discuss in Chapter Three], must be consulted."[64] The problem with this, Sumit explained, is that "all these texts disagree with each other! Each show that Shri Mahaprabhuji was in different places doing different things with different people at different times!" Sumit went on to explain that the inconsistencies did not amount to much in terms of matters of faith—all accounts were equally *sacuṃ* ("true").[65] "The problem," he explained, was "how to present the life of Shri Mahaprabhuji in only three days and how to not confuse devotees?" Unlike the Gaudiya Vaishnava tradition, which has one predominantly authoritative sacred biography, the *Caitanya Caritāmṛta*, for its charismatic leader Chaitanya (1486-1534), Vallabhacharya's life was never committed to writing in one widely accepted and authoritative text.[66] In other words, there is no "Final Word" (as Tony K. Stewart has said about the *Caitanya Caritāmṛta*) for the Vallabh Sampraday.[67] While not the focus of this study, it may be possible that the reason

[64] Personal Communication, April 13th, 2012. Sumit Sharma is a scholar and descendant of Vallabhacharya from the female line. That is, he a son of a daughter (a *beṭījī*) of the Vallabh Kul, and is therefore revered, but not able to perform sectarian initiation.

[65] Personal Communication, April 13th, 2012.

[66] For example, see: Keśavrām Kāśīrāma Śāstrī, *Śrī Vallabhācārya Mahāprabhujī: Aitihyamūlak Jīvanī* (Vadodara: Prācyavidyā Mandir Vibhāg, 1977).

[67] See: Stewart, *The Final Word*.

narrative details of Vallabhacharya's life were never committed to writing in a singular authoritative text is because they were, and remain to be, contested in the sectarian community. While an internally fragmented community may have contributed to the lack of such a text's composition during the seventeenth through the nineteenth centuries, I would suggest that in fact the most cherished accounts from Vallabhacharya's sacred biography are found in the *84VV*.[68] These accounts, as we will shortly see, have much more to do with the character of the theologian as a charismatic leader who successfully uplifted *daivī jīv*s, bringing them into relationship with Krishna, than they do with the specifics of his great deeds, miraculous acts, or illustrious ancestry.[69]

Needless to say, providing a summary of Vallabhacharya's life according to contradictory accounts in the *vārtā*s—not to mention other sources—cannot be easily done here. Regardless, below I offer an informal summary of the theologian's life according to my reading of *vārtā* tradition:

> Vallabh Bhatt was born to a family of Telugu Brahmans of the Bharadvaja *gotra* (which was also included within the Velanata or Vellanadu group of Brahmins), who adhered to the *taittrīya* branch of the *Yajurveda*. Vallabh's ancestral village, Kankaravada, sat at the banks of the Godavari river in the region known today as Andhra Pradesh. Kankaravada's inhabitants had been devoted Vaishnavas for generations. In fact, the birth of an *avatār* of Krishna was expected: an early ancestor had been promised that once the family had collectively performed one hundred *soma* sacrifices, such an *avatār* would be born. Soon after Lakshman Bhatt performed the one hundredth sacrifice, he and his wife Illammagaru (a

[68] For further on Vallabhacharya's character in the *vārtā*s, see: Dalmia, "Forging Community," 129-154.

[69] One text that explicitly focuses on Vallabhacharya's characteristics is Vitthalnath's Sanskrit *Sarvottamstotra*, which enumerates Vallabhacharya's one hundred and eight names and corresponding qualities. In contemporary versions of the text, which invariably include a Gujarati translation and commentary, each of Vallabhacharya's names are aligned with one or more of the narratives from the *84VV*.

daughter of a priest serving the rulers of the Vijayanagar empire) gave birth to Vallabh—the long-awaited *avatār*. Vallabh's birth took place while his parents were on a pilgrimage in north India. While they had intended to stay in the city of Banaras, political upheaval had pushed the pregnant couple back south. On Sunday, the eleventh of the dark half of the month of *vaiśākh* (April-May), at midnight, in 1479 CE, while on route in Champaranya, in the deep and unpopulated forests of today's Madhya Pradesh, Illammagaru delivered a premature stillborn son. Grief-stricken, the parents left the dead infant wrapped in leaves at the foot of a *śamī* tree. However, after leaving their stillborn son, Lakshman had a dream in which Krishna told him that his son was still alive. When the parents returned to the *śamī* tree they found that indeed the infant was alive, unharmed and lying in a protective circle of blazing fire. Instead of continuing south, Vallabh's parents went back to Banaras, where their son was educated according to orthodox Brahminical norms. By the time Vallabh turned eleven, he had mastered the *Veda*s, *Vendānta*, the six *śāstra*s, and the *purāṇa*s.

Vallabh took three pilgrimages during his lifetime. Vallabh's third and final pilgrimage is the most significant in the memory of the tradition: it was during this time that the young theologian had the ultimate victory in a philosophical debate with the *māyāvādī*s in the court of Vijayanagar. Vijayanagar's king, Krishnadevaray, was so impressed by Vallabh's skill in debate that he presented the young theologian with lavish gifts of gold (*kanakābhiṣeka*). Vallabh kept seven gold coins and distributed the rest of the wealth to local Brahmins. More significant than the gift of gold was the gift to Vallabh of the title *ācārya*. Vallabh was first offered the title by the leader of the Madhva Sampraday, which he turned down. Later Vallabh accepted the title when it was offered by Bilvamangal, the current *ācārya* of the sect founded by Vishnuswami.

In the meantime, Vallabhacharya was called upon by Shrinathji to establish worship to the deity at Govardhan Hill in Braj and to take a wife (Mahalakshmi, or Akkaji—a south Indian term of respect meaning "elder sister"). These events are dated in hagiographies at 1504 and 1501 CE respectively. Mahalakshmi and Vallabhacharya gave birth to Gopinath in 1512 CE and to Vitthalnath in 1516 CE.

In 1530, Vallabhacharya took vows of renunciation and moved from Adel, a town not far from Allahabad where he had raised his two sons, back to Banaras. Within a month Vallabhacharya called his sons and chief disciples to the banks of the Ganga river. There he gave leadership of the *sampradāy* to Gopinath, who was nineteen at the time. After this, Vallabhacharya entered the Ganga where he was immediately enveloped in a brilliant flash of light and slowly ascended into the sky. After the death of Gopinath in 1543, however, Gopinath's twelve-year-old son, Purushottam (1531-1551) assumed power. When Purushottam himself died at the age of eighteen, Vitthalnath assumed leadership of the *sampradāy*—in due

course passing on leadership to his seven sons.[70]

According to the *vārtā*s, Vitthalnath's seven sons were given the exclusive right to initiate new disciples into the *sampradāy* and also to perform *sevā* for the primary sectarian deities that had self-manifest, like Shrinathji, during the life of Vallabhacharya.[71] In addition to Shrinathji there are eight other Krishna *svarūp*s that are particularly revered within the *sampradāy*.[72] Collectively these *svarūp*s are known as the *navnidhi* ("nine treasures"). Today Shrinathji and another *navnidhi svarūp* are kept in a temple in Nathdwara. The seven other *navnidhi svarūp*s are kept elsewhere in Rajasthan,

[70] As we saw in the *Śrīnāthjī kī Prākaṭya Vārtā*, this process of succession was not smooth. *Vārtā* literature does not hide these succession struggles, but does justify why it is Vitthalnath, and not his elder brother Gopinath, who is lauded as an incarnation of Vallabhacharya. The main explanation for this is that Gopinath, while not explicitly a *māyāvādī*, is described as being a *maryādāmārgī*—that is, a soul on the path of restrictions and restraints who is caught up in the pursuit of knowledge rather than *bhakti*. For further on this history, see: Barz, *The Bhakti Sect of Vallabhācārya*, 52-55; Entwistle, *Braj: Centre of Krishna Pilgrimage,* 151–4, 160–66, 177–8; Mītal, *Brajastha Vallabha Sampradāya kā Itihās*. For an extremely detailed account of the history of the Third House, see: Kaṇṭhāmaṇi Śāstrī, *Kāṃkrolī kā Itihās* (Kankroli: Vidyā Vibhāg, 1939).

[71] This exclusive right has been challenged by lay devotees and by female members of the Vallabh Kul, including the contemporary leader Goswami Indira Betiji. Goswami Indira Betiji caused much controversy over her decision to initiate her own disciples into the sect during the 1990s. She has since stopped initiating disciples, but remains a popular leader who is responsible for founding many *puṣṭimārgīy* temples in North America and the United Kingdom. Even more popular than Goswami Indira Betiji is a lay leader who goes by the title Acharya Brahmarushi Param Puja Shri Kiritbhaiji. During the late 1990s, Kiritbhai—a businessman who allegedly spent time in prison during the 1980s because of financial fraud—began to use oral exegesis on the *Bhagavadgītā* and other texts to attract *puṣṭimārgīy* disciples, particularly those in the diaspora (Kiritbhai has lived most of his life in the United Kingdom). While other lay-leaders (such as a Bombay-based physician who goes simply by the name Sudhirbhai) have challenged the Vallabh Kul's exclusive right to initiation, Kiritbhai has initiated thousands of devotees in the diaspora, which has seriously angered living members of the Vallabh Kul and many lay devotees (Shri Shyam Manohar Goswami, Personal Communication, July 18th, 2012). For Kiritbhai's website, see: "Shrinathdham." Accessed March 12th, 2014. http://www.shrinathdham.com/.

[72] For further on the status of Krishna *svarūp*s, see: Bennett, "In Nanda Baba's House," 200-204; Norbert Peabody, "In Whose Turban does the Lord Reside?: The Objectification of Charisma and the Fetishism of Objects in the Hindu Kingdom of Kota," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 33, no. 4 (1991): 726-754.

Gujarat, and Uttar Pradesh. Each deity is cared for by one of Vitthalnath's seven son's lineages, known as the seven "houses" (*ghar*s) or "seats" (*gaddī*s or *pīṭh*s) of the *sampradāy*. As the *Prākaṭya Vārtā* suggests, and as the contemporary situation continues to attest, following male primogeniture has not guaranteed peaceful relations amongst members of the Vallabh Kul. The list below indicates the distribution of the *navnidhi* and their current locations:

Son	***Svarūp***	**Current Location**
Girdhar	Shrinathji	Nathdwara, Rajasthan
	Shri Navnitpriyaji	Nathdwara
	Shri Mathureshji	Kota, Rajasthan (First House)
Govindray	Shri Vitthalnathji	Nathdwara (Second House)
Balakrishna	Shri Dwarkanathji	Kankroli, Rajasthan (Third House)
Gokulnath	Shri Gokulnathji	Gokul, Uttar Pradesh (Fourth House)
Ragunath	Shri Gokulchandramaji	Kaman, Rajasthan (Fifth House)
Yadunath	Shri Balakrishnaji	Surat, Gujarat (Sixth House)[73]
Ghanshyam	Shri Madanmohanji	Kaman, Rajasthan (Seventh House)

II c. The *Caurāsī Baiṭhak Caritra*

The *Caurāsī Baiṭhak Caritra*, likely first committed to writing during the nineteenth century, establishes the importance of sacred geography in the Vallabh Sampraday.[74] Like the *84VV* and *252VV*, most versions of the *Caritra* do not flow in

[73] There is dispute between two claimants, each with a different *svarūp*, for primacy among the descendants of Yadunath. For further on this dispute, see: Dalmia, "The Establishment of the Sixth *Gaddī* of the Vallabha Sampradāy," 94-117. Tulsidas (the supposed adopted son of Vitthalnath) and Tulsidas' Shri Gopinathji *svarūp* also have highly disputed histories. For further on these histories, see: Alan Entwistle, trans., *The Rāsa Māna ke Pada of Kevalarāma: A Medieval Hindi Text of the Eighth Gaddī of the Vallabha Sect* (Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 1993).

[74] In addition to Tandan's assertion that this text was redacted in the nineteenth century, several sectarian leaders reported to me during 2011-2012 that they believed the *Caurāsī Baiṭhak Caritra* to be a modern construction. The reason given for this assertion was that new *baiṭhak*s continue to be discovered for the specific purpose of authenticating or establishing physical places as authoritative. In a brief article, Haberman presents the text in terms of a *digvijay*, or a "conquest

linear order. Rather, the text weaves in and out of various moments of Vallabhacharya's life, focusing on the theologian's three pilgrimages. Part of Vallabhacharya's mission in travelling around the subcontinent, the *Caritra* tells us, was to spread his *śuddhādvaita* philosophical system and specifically to reduce the prominence of the *māyāvādī*s. In the *Caritra*, however, Vallabhacharya's philosophical prowess is not emphasized in terms of his ability to formally debate philosophical opponents. Rather, the *ācārya*'s primary conversion tool is his charisma and passion for the *BhP*. Accordingly, many of the eighty-four accounts in the *Baiṭhak Caritra* include a summary of how Vallabhacharya performs a *Bhāgavata-saptāh*, or a seven-day sermon on the *BhP*.[75]

Why are the eighty-four places highlighted in the text significant and what do the

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of territory in all directions." See: David L. Haberman, "A Theology of Place: Pilgrimage in the *Caurāsī Baiṭhak Caritra*," in *Studies in Early Modern Indo-Aryan Languages, Literature and Culture*, edited by Alan. W. Entwistle (New Delhi: Manohar, 1999), 155-166.

[75] This portrayal of Vallabhacharya as a charismatic theologian is shown in the seventy-third narrative of the *Baiṭhak Caritra*. In the narrative, Vallabhacharya, simply by reciting the *BhP,* converts a group of *māyāvādī*s who had previously been worshippers of the god Shiva. Shiva himself becomes so enamored by Vallabhacharya's reading of the *BhP* that he decides to approach the young theologian to ask about his method of "conversion." "How is it," asks Shiva, "that you simply give *sākṣāt darśan* (a direct vision of divinity through Vallabhacharya himself)—and, without debate, break the *māyāmat* and establish the *bhaktimārg*?" (Dvārkādās Parīkh, ed., *Mahāprabhujī kī Nijvārtā, Gharuvārtā, Baiṭhak Caritra ityādī* (Indore: Vaiṣṇav Mitra Maṇḍal, 2010), 253-258). This portrayal of how Vallabhacharya attracts new followers is more or less consistent in other *vārtā* texts. Occasionally Vallabhacharya performs miracles to convince individuals of his divinity (e.g., the miracle of being in several places at one time). These miracles are always defended as expressions of true divinity rather than cheap tricks as practiced by other holy-men. Hariray suggests that Vallabhacharya performs such miracles to communicate his divinity to those who would not be able to recognize it in any other way. For accounts of miraculous acts, see the *vārtā*s of Padmanabhadas (number four) and Tripurdas (number twenty-three) from the *84VV*, and the account about Vishram Ghat in the *Śrīnāthjī kī Prākaṭya Vārtā* (Paṇḍyā, *Śrī Govardhannāthjī ke Prākaṭya kī Vārtā,* 10-12). For further on magic in *bhakti* hagiographies, see: Patton Burchett, "My Miracle Trumps Your Magic: Confrontations with Yogis in Sufi and Bhakti Hagiographical Literature," in *Yoga Powers: Extraordinary Capacities Attained Through Meditation and Concentration*, edited by Knut Jacobsen (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 345-380.

*baiṭhak*s map out? Because of his power as *mukhāvatār* and *agnisvarūp*, Vallabhacharya is clearly no ordinary being. Consequently, the *Caritra* explains that he must deliver his readings of the *BhP* under a *śamī* (or *choṅkar*) tree. This is because these trees are said to have qualities that are able to absorb the heat of Vallabhacharya's powerful speech, which is otherwise unbearable to the human ear. Other than these qualifications the logic to Vallabhacharya's supposed pilgrimage routes and the corresponding establishment of *baiṭhak*s at first seems random. However, the concentration of *baiṭhak*s in today's state of Gujarat and in Braj makes it clear that these geographical regions must have been of particular concern to the early sectarian community. Sectarian logic claims that Vallabhacharya travelled wherever there were *daivī jīv*s in need of "uplifting." Non-sectarian historians argue that Vallabhacharya and his ancestors went to places where economic and political unease produced willing converts to a new *sampradāy*, which, according to the *vārtā*s, emphasized the inclusion of the downtrodden and allowed for the maintenance of community-based interpretations of *varṇāśramadharma*. Shandip Saha has also argued that the focus on Gujarat was directly linked to gaining the support of wealthy merchant patrons—a topic we will return to in the following chapter.[76] To this, I would also add that since many of the eighty-four *baiṭhak*s are near to other major religious sites, there is a clear sense of what Muzaffar Alam has called "competitive spirituality"—that is, a competitive co-existence between two religious communities. While Alam specifically addresses the competitive co-existence that developed between Hindu and Muslim communities during the late-medieval period, *vārtā* literature

[76] Saha, "A Community of Grace," 225-242.

indicates competitive co-existences between fellow Vaishnava communities.[77] For instance, one of the most visited *baiṭhak*s in south India (traditionally the thirty-eighth *baiṭhak*) stands directly next to the popular Venkateshwar Balaji temple in Andhra Pradesh.[78]

Today many more than the standard eighty-four *baiṭhak*s of the *Baiṭhak Caritra* are maintained by one or more of the Seven Houses of the *sampradāy* and can still be visited.[79] These *baiṭhak*s also exist for Vitthalnath (who has twenty-eight), Gokulnath (who has thirteen), Hariray (who has seven), and many other members of the Vallabh Kul. Whatever their origin narratives, the ongoing (re)establishment of *baiṭhak*s across northwest India shows how *puṣṭimārgīy* devotees continue to participate in the marking and making of the *sampradāy*'s sacred geography.

Conclusion

This section has provided a summary of the primary texts in the *vārtā* canon as well as an introduction to these texts' history and provenance. In so doing, I have also introduced the Vallabh Sampraday's own telling of its emergence as a *sampradāy* with distinct hierarchies, deities, geographies, and principles of sectarian belonging. As Shandip Saha has nicely put it, *vārtā* literature offers an image of *puṣṭimārgīy* self-

[77] Muzzafar Alam, "Competition and Co-Existence: Indo-Islamic Interaction in Medieval North India," *Itinerario* 13, no. 1 (1989): 37-59.

[78] In addition to the potential for competitive spirituality, we might also consider this phenomenon in terms of a sense of spiritual alignment around certain religious sites—that is, in terms of a *shared* recognition that particular geographical locations are sacred.

[79] "Can still be visited" is not entirely accurate because many *baiṭhak*s were only "discovered" by contemporary devotees. In line with standard *vārtā* logic, those who establish these sites claim to have had dreams in which Vallabhacharya, Krishna, or even a living member of the Vallabh Kul calls for the establishment or recovery of a *baiṭhak*.

identity by "emphasizing the community as a well-knit, self-sufficient group of devotees who owed their final allegiance to Kṛṣṇa and the community's religious authorities, known as *mahārāja*s."[80] What Saha and others have not attend to in their descriptions of the *vārtā*s is the way in which these texts function primarily as devotional and didactic narratives, which provide models for devotional affect through aesthetically distinct accounts of devotees' lives. The following section will attend to just these matters.

Part III: Models of Devotion and Narrative Aesthetics in the *Caurāsī Vaiṣṇavan kī Vārtā* and the *Do Sau Bāvan Vaiṣṇavan kī Vārtā*

The *84VV* and *252VV* are the primary hagiographies of the *vārtā* canon and, alongside the *aṣṭachāp*'s devotional poetry, are the most popular vernacular texts of the Vallabh Sampraday. Whether or not all contemporary devotees engage with these texts regularly, their narratives and the passionate discussions that surround them are familiar to all. As one modern commentator asserts, with only slight hyperbole, "there would hardly be a single place where [*puṣṭimārgīy*] Vaishnavas are found in India where there is not at least one copy [of these texts]."[81] The *84VV* is likely the earliest of the *vārtā* texts, with an extant manuscript from 1640.[82] The *252VV*, while naturally paired with its earlier

[80] Saha, "A Community of Grace," 225.

[81] Dvārkādās Puruṣottamdās Parīkh, ed., *Caurāsī Vaiṣṇavan kī Vārtā* (*Tīn Janma kī Līlā Bhāvnā Vālī*) (Mathura: Śrī Govarddhan Granthmālā, 1971), *kha*.

[82] I viewed this manuscript during a visit to the Vidya Vibhag Library in Kankroli in March 2012. It is no longer catalogued for library use, but is kept in the private library of Vrajeshkumar Maharaj, the current leader of the Third House, whose headquarters are in Kankroli. The manuscript contains one hundred and twenty-five folios, with twenty-six lines per page. The scribe identifies himself as a Sanadhya Brahmin from Gokul (in Braj). This version of the text

counterpart by today's readers, has a less clear textual history. Taking into account various factors, including references to certain historical incidents, it is likely that the *252VV* was completed in the early decades of the eighteenth century some time after the establishment of Nathdwara in 1672.[83] Nonetheless, both texts are traditionally attributed to the oral accounts of Gokulnath, while Hariray is named as the primary redactor and commentator. The earliest extant manuscript of the *84VV* that contains Hariray's commentary, known as the *Bhāvprakāś* (an "illumination" of the text's *bhāv*, or "mood" or inner meaning), exists with a colophon bearing the date of *samvat* 1752 (1695 CE). The *252VV* exists with Hariray's *Bhāvprakāś* in a manuscript from 1730 CE.

On the one hand, the *84VV* and the *252VV* are constituted by somewhat formulaic narratives, the content of which might seem rather conventional to readers familiar with other genres of South Asian hagiography. Each of the numbered *vārtā*s offers a brief series of *prasaṅg*s ("episodes") from the life of one or more of Vallabhacharya's or Vitthalnath's disciples, which highlight similar themes, such as the protagonist's devotional qualities, spiritual struggles and successes, and intimate love for his or her *guru* and Krishna. On the other hand, when read closely, one quickly discovers that the

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does not contain Hariray's *Bhāvprakāś*. The earliest extant manuscript of the *84VV* with the *Bhāvprakāś* is dated at 1695 CE. For further, see: Barz, "The *Caurāsī Vaiṣṇavan kī Vārtā*."

[83] According to Shandip Saha, the *252VV* was likely compiled by disciples of Hariray. The *vārtā*s of Ladabai, Dharai, and Gangabai, for instance, all contain details concerning Shrinathji's exodus to Nathdwara and indicate that the revision of the text continued until after the establishment of Shrinathji's temple in 1672 CE. (Saha, "A Community of Grace," 231, footnote 22). Tandan notes that Gokulnath's disciple Krishna Bhatt first transcribed his *guru*'s *vacanāmṛt* (Ṭaṇḍan, *Vārtā Sāhitya*, 125-130). Others claim that Gokulnath himself worked directly with Hariray in editing the *vacanāmṛt* narratives. See, for example: Premnārāyaṇ Ṭaṇḍan, *Sūrdās kī Vārtā* (Lucknow: Nandan Prakāśan, 1968). Contemporary religious leaders and devotees also have given me various accounts of this textual history.

*vārtā*s are rather aesthetically distinct from other genres of *bhakti* hagiography, and that there is no one ideal type of devotee, no one measure of *bhakti*, and no singular prescription for social and devotional behaviors.[84] What is shared, however, across all of the accounts in the *84VV* and *252VV* is the emphasis on how the protagonists experience Krishna in the context of their mundane lives, thereby bringing the *alaukik* ("other-worldly") into the *laukik* ("worldly").

In this section I first introduce the various types of devotees depicted in the *84VV* and *252VV*, and show how these figures cultivate relationships with their *guru*s, with Krishna, and with one another as a community. Who is eligible for entrance into the sectarian fold to begin with, and what are the various categories of devotional and social practice that the texts' authors emphasize? How do caste and gender play a role in the devotee's journey on the Pushtimarg? How do the *vārtā*s' position(s) on these issues relate to or build on Vallabhacharya's writings and reflect the historical circumstances of their composition? The interested reader can also refer to the Appendix to see two transcriptions and translations of full *vārtā* accounts from the *84VV*. In the latter part of this section I will discuss the various layers of the *84VV* and *252VV*, including Hariray's *Bhāvprakāś*. The commentary is one of several dialogic features of the texts, which bring the *vārtā*s into conversation with *other* texts and with the texts' *own* implied readers.

III a. Who are the protagonists of the *84VV* and *252VV*?

Thus far, this chapter has introduced a limited number of figures from the

[84] Heidi Pauwels speaks to the layered nature of hagiography when she writes: "[…] these hagiographic stories may seem straightforward, even naïve, but they are quite complex, speaking on different levels all at once" ("Hagiography and Community Formation," 55).

*vārtā*s—namely Shrinathji and Vallabhacharya and his family. The majority of protagonists from these texts, however, are figures that may not even be mentioned by name and will, for the most part, only be found within the sectarian canon. While all of Vallabhacharya's disciples are described as being *daivī jīv*s, whose destiny it was to serve Krishna, no two figures are exactly alike: each character has distinct qualities and each narrative imparts different, though certainly related, lessons to the reader. Collectively, the protagonists from the *84VV* and the *252VV* represent a diversity of socio-economic, religious, and cultural backgrounds from a variety of geographical regions (from as far north as Kabul, as far south as Tamil Nadu, as far east as Bengal, and as far west as Gujarat). The reader encounters men, women, children, kings, queens, farmers, carpenters, merchants, thieves, jewelers, beggars, Brahmins, Jains, yogis, Muslims, goddess worshipers, tribal peoples, prostitutes, orphans, child brides, and widows. In addition to presenting the social diversity of early followers, the texts also emphasize the diversity of human emotions and behaviors. Though some characters exhibit conventional qualities of humility, patience, and unwavering faith in Krishna's divine grace, others are irascible, vain, tactless, or even violently aggressive.[85]

Given the diversity of these figures, it is not surprising that each protagonist comes upon the Pushtimarg in a different manner and at different stages in his or her life. Some hear of Vallabhacharya and Vitthalnath through family members or friends, while others are attracted to one of the *ācārya*s after hearing a public recitation of the *BhP*. There are also those who first become passionate about Shrinathji, only turning towards

[85] For an article on an irascible devotee, see: Barz, "Kṛṣṇadās Adhikārī: An Irascible Devotee's Approach to the Divine."

the Pushtimarg itself when the deity explains that all of his devotees must first receive sectarian initiation before they can fully cultivate a relationship with the divine.[86]

III b. Initiation and *sevā*

In most cases, initiation as it is described in the *vārtā*s consists of the following: taking a ritual bath (*snān*); receiving the initiatory *nām nivedan* and *brahmasambandha mantra*s and a *tulsī mālā* (necklace made of Tulsi wood); and, finally, receiving either a Krishna *svarūp* or another physical object (e.g., a printed cloth with Vallabhacharya's footprints) for which *sevā* should be performed.[87] Much like Shrinathji, the *svarūp*s that many figures in the *vārtā*s care for are described as having emerged as stone forms from the earth or from rivers. Some *svarūp*s, however, are described as having been man-made from stone or metal.[88] In the *vārtā*s and today, devotees' personal *svarūp*s are ubiquitously referred to as *ṭhākurjī* (hereafter Thakurji) and sometimes as *lāljī*.[89]

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[86] For example, see: Snell, "Raskhan the Neophyte: Hindu Perspectives on a Muslim Vaishnava," in *Urdu and Muslim South Asia: Studies in Honour of Ralph Russell,* edited by Christopher Shackle (London: SOAS, 1989), 29-37.

[87] The *nām nivedan* is the first part of the initiation process. See my earlier discussion of this in Part I of this chapter. See also: Barz, *The Bhakti Sect of Vallabhācārya*, 18-21.The details of these initiation rituals in the contemporary context do not differ in any significant way from what is described in the *vārtā*s. What is significantly different, however, is that contemporary devotees are often initiated in large numbers rather than individually. This is mostly due to the availability of cotemporary *gosvāmī*s to perform initiations. After these large-scale initiation ceremonies the initiates will normally host a celebratory feast or make a donation to their local temple.

[88] According to the *vārtā*s, and still common in contemporary practice, *svarūp*s (whether self-manifested or man-made) are to be ritually consecrated by one's *guru* before *sevā* begins. This process normally involves bathing the *svarūp* in various purifying substances (e.g., milk).

[89] *Lāl* is a common term of endearment for a small child, but is also used specifically to refer to Krishna. While in the sectarian context the term *ṭhākur* refers specifically to Krishna *svarūp*s, the word more generally refers to an object of reverence, a "deity," or an "honorific title added to the name of a distinguished person" (Vaman Shivaram Apte, *The Practical Sanskrit Dictionary* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1998) 750). As with the *vārtā*s' protagonists, devotees today can

Once the *svarūp* or other sanctified object is bestowed upon the devotee (*ṭhākurjī mathu padhrānā*), he or she is to learn the ways of *sevā* from Vallabhacharya, Vitthalnath, or a fellow devotee. *Sevā*, we learn from the narratives, often requires offering special food items (*bhog*) to one's *svarūp*, as well as singing to him (referred to as *rāg* or *kīrtan*) and dressing him (*śṛṅgār*). These actions normally occur in the privacy of the devotee's home, sometimes even in seclusion from kith and kin. The moments of interaction between the deity and devotee are intensely intimate and loving. It is significant to note that the *puṣṭimārgīy* devotee does not rely on priestly mediation in domestic worship. Orthodox Brahmins in their role as ritual mediators are in fact repeatedly mocked in the narratives. Theirs is the *maryādāmārg*, and is portrayed as being stifled and constrained by endless boundaries and meaningless attention to the acquisition of knowledge over devotion.[90]

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choose to worship a *svarūp* in any number of forms. For example, *svarūp*s can be fashioned in the form of Balakrishna ("Child Krishna"), Shrinathji, Navnitpriyaji ("The Butter Lover") or some other manifestation. While the terms *ṭhākurjī* and *lāljī* are used to refer to three-dimensional figures (that is, statues of Krishna), devotees can also perform *sevā* to two-dimensional forms, such as paintings of Shrinathji, which devotees refer to as *citrajī* (*citra* meaning "painting" or "drawing"). I have never encountered a devotee who thought of his or her *svarūp* as anything other than a male—usually childlike—embodiment of Krishna. For further on contemporary devotees' relationships with Krishna *svarūp*s, see Chapter Four and also: Bennett, "In Nanda Baba's House: The Devotional Experience in Pushti Marg Temples," 200-204.

[90] The position of Brahmins in the community both historically and today is complex. While a person of any caste or community can be initiated into the sect (according to both textual sources and to contemporary practices), members of the Vallabh Kul are all Brahmin and all of the temple *sevak*s who physically prepare food and clothing for the temple-based deities are also Brahmin. According to Shyam Manohar Goswami—a prominent sectarian leader, whose work I discuss in Chapter Three—many of the hired Brahmin *sevak*s in major *puṣṭimārgīy havelī*s are only *puṣṭimārgīy* in name. That is, these individuals are often primarily followers of other local traditions, but perform temple rituals according to their positions as *sevak*s in *puṣṭimārgīy havelī*s (Personal Communication, July 18th, 2012). I also observed this to be the case during my time with Brahmin *sevak*s at various temples in Ahmedabad and throughout Rajasthan.

In contrast, the *puṣṭimārgīy* devotee him or herself can touch, play with, sing to, feed, and put to sleep his or her *svarūp*. Without strict customs, however, the performance of *sevā* as it is described in the *vārtā*s is somewhat idiosyncratic: as long as *sevā* is performed with loving devotion, it appears that it is not necessary to follow any fixed set of external rules. If the devotee does something wrong Thakurji himself steps in to correct his *sevak* or calls upon Vallabhacharya or Vitthalnath to set matters straight. However, even what would be seemingly basic prescriptions for Vaishnava ritual practice, such as refraining from *sevā* during times of physical pollution (e.g., during menstruation or after the death of a family member), are shown to be negotiable in the presence of sincere and fervent love for Krishna. We will return later to how Hariray's *Bhāvprakāś* deals with the presentation of such potentially questionable actions. Suffice it to say here that the texts' portrayal of *sevā* clearly emphasizes unmediated and passionate love for one's personal *svarūp*.[91]

Once the *sevak* begins to cultivate devotion to Thakurji through *sevā*, the deity begins to speak to his devotee and becomes an integral part of his or her daily routines. This process is referred to in the narratives as *sānubhāvatā janānā*, or "causing the intimate experience" of Thakurji. The tenderness and intimacy of the moments in which Thakurji interacts with his devotees is truly at the heart of the *84VV* and *252VV* and, despite the use of the narratives as a platform from which to debate correct conduct and social behavior amongst contemporary devotees, the simple beauty of loving devotion is never forgotten. The following episode from the *vārtā* of an elderly widowed woman, the

[91] As we will see in Chapter Three and Chapter Four, the way in which the practice of *sevā* in the *vārtā*s is portrayed is crucial to many of the discussions and debates that surround the texts today.

kṣatriya woman from Sinhanand, is one of many examples of the way in which Thakurji interacts with his devotees:

> After some time, the *kṣatriya* woman ran out of money and became destitute. After completing her *sevā* for her Krishna *svarūp*, she would spin cotton and sell it to support herself. Whenever the vegetable seller would come by the house of the *kṣatriya* woman, Thakurji would call out, "O' Ma! The vegetable lady has come, go get me something!" Then the *kṣatriya* woman would go and buy a small amount of everything. Similarly, whenever the fruit seller would come by, Thakurji would say, "O' Ma! Go fetch me some fruits!" Then, even if she had little money, the woman would buy a variety of items for Thakurji [from the fruit and vegetable seller].
>
> Now [after observing the *kṣatriya* woman's behavior], the fruit and vegetable seller came to suspect that the *kṣatriya* woman would not allow her darling son out of the house because she feared he would be given the evil eye. "If this *kṣatriya* lady comes to buy from my cart first thing in the morning, thought the vegetable seller to herself, then I'll surely be lucky in my sales throughout the rest of the day. I'll wait beside her door each day until she comes to buy from my cart." Indeed, the old woman would come daily and purchase all types of items—cucumbers, spinach, and all kinds of greens and other fresh items. From these items, she would lovingly prepare food to offer to her Thakurji. One day, when the vegetable lady was passing by the *kṣatriya* woman's home, Thakurji ran to the door and called out, "Come quick! My mother is coming to fetch something!" The vegetable lady heard the beautiful voice and came running, but Thakurji quickly went back inside the house and was never seen by the vendor. "My darling! You mustn't run out like that, you may be given the evil eye," the *kṣatriya* woman scolded her Thakurji. "But the vegetable lady was about to leave—then how would you get anything? How would you feed me?" He responded. "My darling," the woman continued, "many vegetable sellers come around. I was inside, preparing things for your *sevā*, so I didn't hear the vendor's call. Please, don't leave the house like that lest the gaze of wicked folks in town fall upon you!" Then, just like a worldly child, Thakurji began to argue with the woman saying, "now that vegetable woman has left! How will I eat? How will you feed me my meal?!" The woman assured Thakurji, telling him that she would get vegetables from another vendor or from the bazaar. "Don't argue with me—just be content!" Then, like a small child, Thakurji climbed up on the woman's shoulders and whined, "but when will you bring me food?!" In

this way, Thakurji bestowed much grace on the *kṣatriya* woman.[92]

This *prasaṅg* is particularly poignant for readers because of its refrain about how Thakurji behaves "like a child" (*bālak kī nāīṁ*). While theologically speaking Vallabhacharya's writing does not privilege *vātsalya bhāva* (the mood of parental devotion) over other traditionally recognized types of devotion (e.g., *śṛṅgāra, dāsya, sakhya* etc.), it is widely accepted in both *vārtā* literature and in contemporary practice that Thakurji should be cared for and loved as a divine child.[93]

Despite their success in cultivating intimate relationships with Thakurji, the *vārtā*s' protagonists, including the figure of the *kṣatriya* woman introduced above, are hardly perfect models of virtue and grace. They make mistakes in their *sevā*, run into social blunders at every corner, and use uncouth words even to their *guru*s and to Thakurji himself. These seeming shortcomings, however, give the narratives' authors many opportunities to teach sectarian *siddhānt* ("doctrine" or lessons) to their readers. In another episode from the *vārtā* introduced above, we learn that the *kṣatriya* woman does not make enough money from her spinning job to feed her hungry and demanding deity anything other than plain bread. When her situation does not improve, the elderly woman takes out a loan so that she can properly feed her *svarūp* ("I have no husband or son to earn in this household," she exclaims). Rather than praise her plan, Thakurji severely

[92] Parīkh, *Caurāsī Vaiṣṇavan kī Vārtā* (2011), 333.

[93] From Vallabhacharya's *Subodhinī* and other works, it is evident that the theologian, like many Vaishnava thinkers of his time, favored *śṛṅgāra rasa*. This *rasa* is occasionally discussed in the *vārtā*s with reference to *sevā* practices. See, for example, the *84VV*'s fifteenth *vārtā,* which tells the narrative of a *kṣatriya* woman from Mahavan who said to have been given a piece of cloth with the imprint of Vallabhacharya's feet, rather than a *svarūp*, because she was so attached to her *guru*. It was to these footprints that she performed *sevā* with the "*bhāv* of Swaminiji," that is, with *śṛṅgāra rasa*.

scolds his caretaker, telling her that taking out loans is dangerous and should always be avoided. In other narratives, the *sevak*'s social or ritual faults are scolded not by the deity or *guru*, but by fellow Vaishnavas who think themselves superior in the *ācār*, or proper ritual conduct, of *sevā*. The *siddhānt* of episodes such as these is that one should practice humility and not look badly upon others. While one should show other Vaishnavas the ways of loving devotion, one should never scold others or be prideful.

III c. Questions of caste, occupation, family and gender

While some narratives emphasize that distinctions of *jāti* ("caste" or community) cease to matter after sectarian initiation, caste remains a significant, while ambiguous, issue in the *84VV* and *252VV*.[94] We might have already noticed from the title of the protagonist introduced above (the "*kṣatriya* woman") that the narratives' redactors scrupulously documented information on the *jāti* of each disciple. When initiating a devotee of a lower caste or of a distinctly different religious community (e.g., a Muslim), Vallabhacharya and Vitthalnath ask the following: "How will you carry out *sevā* in your community?" The devotee, always eager to quickly be taken into the *puṣṭimārgīy* fold, responds, explaining that he or she will distance him or herself from *maryādāmārgī*s and will spend as much time as possible with other *puṣṭimārgīy* Vaishnavas.

While this entrance into a new "Vaishnava family" is certainly portrayed as being liberating for some figures in the *vārtā*s, it would be a mistake to characterize the early

[94] The term *jāti* is described as follows: "position fixed by birth; community or caste group," "kind, race; genus, species; nationality" (McGregor, *The Oxford Hindi-English Dictionary*, 367). Likewise the term *jāt*, which is sometimes used in the context of *baṛī jāt* to refer to Muslims, can mean "lineage, family; community, caste" (Ibid). *Zāt* too can have a similar meaning: "breed, kind; community, caste; sex" (Ibid).

community depicted in the narratives as part of a populist movement that offered social and economic advancement to the downtrodden. Close readings of *vārtā* sources do not show that Vallabhacharya was interested in initiating devotees from any one particular social group, although his initiates did include members of marginalized groups (*śūdra*s, widows, etc.). According to the *vārtā*s, however, it appears that during Vitthalnath's lifetime (1515-1585) the *sampradāy* actively sought to convert royalty, merchants, and various types of political officials. While we do have non-sectarian historical evidence for Akbar and Aurangzeb's support of the community (in the form of *farmān*s etc.), certain connections with Rajput and Mughal leaders are likely fictional, even if very telling.[95]

Although some narratives recount how devotees change their occupations after initiation, such as the two tribal devotees who give up their thieving ways for farming, most *vārtā* protagonists are encouraged to remain within their own community while simultaneously accepting a new Vaishnava community and new ways of living (e.g., adopting a vegetarian diet).[96] This kind of double life can be extraordinarily challenging for characters in the *vārtā*s and many attempt (but fail) to renounce their worldly duties in order to fully commit themselves to the *sampradāy*. This is the case in the account of

[95] The *Bhāvsindhu*, for instance, talks about Vitthalnath's friendship with Rani Durgavati, who is credited with arranging his second marriage. There is no other sectarian or non-sectarian source to verify such a claim. For information on the *farmān*s ("edicts") issued by the Mughals in support of the Vallabh Sampraday, see: Richardson, "Mughal and Rajput Patronage of the Bhakti Sect of the Maharajas," 31–57; Krishnalal Mohanlal Jhaveri, *Imperial Farmans (AD 1577 to AD 1805) granted to the Ancestors of his Holiness the Tilkayat Maharaj* (Bombay: The News Printing Press, 1928).

[96] The account of the two thieving tribal devotees is typically found in the one hundred and ninety-sixth *vārtā* of the *84VV* (*Ṭhag-cor vīrāṃ ke gare meṁ phāṁsī ḍārī*).

Vallabhacharya's carpenter disciple in the *84VV*. In the narrative, the young man becomes immediately enchanted upon seeing Vallabhacharya. His passionate attachment finally convinces the *ācārya* that the carpenter is worthy of initiation—even though his family is of "another community" (he is a *khātī*). As the young man becomes increasingly obsessed with his *guru*, he abandons his carpentry work to sit all day beside Vallabhacharya. After some time, the carpenter's family becomes upset and complains to Vallabhacharya's wife about their son's behavior: "this carpenter spends day and night with Shri Acharyaji and doesn't do any work. How will we be able to earn a living?" In the end, Vallabhacharya takes pity on the carpenter's family and demands that his fervent devotee carry on with his domestic existence without going mad from "pangs of separation." As we will see in greater detail in later chapters, the issue of renunciation and familial and occupational commitment is up for much debate. Contemporary devotees look to the *vārtā*s for examples on how to deal with situations in which there is tension between what are perceived to be "family values" (and obedience to so-called *śāstrik* norms) and the call to serve Krishna and the *puṣṭimārgīy* community without inhibition.

Tensions between the *laukik* and the *alaukik* are not unique, of course, to the Vallabh Sampraday or even to other *bhakti* traditions in north and northwest India.[97] Nonetheless, the particular style in which *vārtā* protagonists are shown to negotiate between the *laukik* and *alaukik*, and the way in which contemporary readers subsequently interpret such tensions, is rather distinctive. As we saw in the first portion of this chapter,

[97] See, for example: A.K. Ramanujan, "On Women Saints," in *The Collected Essays of A.K. Ramanujan*, edited by Vinay Dharwadker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 270-278.

Vallabhacharya's own writing shows that the theologian was opposed to traditional forms of renunciation. The *vārtā*s draw on this aspect of Vallabhacharya's theology, and use the figure of the wandering ascetic as a source of humor and ridicule, much like the figure of the orthodox Brahmin.[98] The *vārtā* of Ramdas Sanchora of Rajnagar (today's Ahmedabad) is one such foolish figure, with a misguided inclination towards *vairāgya*, or disdain for worldly pleasures. Ramdas is so foolish that he attempts to prevent the woman he was forced to marry from dutifully following him on his pilgrimages to sacred places. Vallabhacharya and Krishna finally set matters straight, telling Ramdas that in order to follow the Pushtimarg, he must return home and attend to family duties. When Ramdas finally realizes this truth, he and his wife become steadfast devotees who perform beautiful *sevā* together in their home.

True to the *vārtā* genre, other narratives complicate the tradition's approach to familial duty and commitment to *sevā*. An example of this appears in a *vārtā* from the *84VV* about a certain "Krishnadas and his wife" (normally the seventy-fifth *vārtā*). The narrative describes how a large group of Vaishnavas, on their way to Adel to take Vallabhacharya's *darśan*, stop at Krishnadas' home. However, on that particular day, there was no grain or food at Krishnadas' home and he himself was out on business. When Krishnadas' wife realizes the unfortunate situation she is in—no food to feed her blessed Vaishnava guests (an important component of *sevā* in the *vārtā*s)—she becomes

[98] While I have not focused on it here, humor is an important element in the *vārtā*s and one that also arises in the contemporary readings of the texts (see Chapter Four). John Stratton Hawley refers to this element of the texts in his forthcoming book: *A Storm of Songs: India and the Idea of the Bhakti Movement* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, [2015]). For a more general study of humor in South Asian religions, see: Selva J. Raj and Corinne G. Dempsey, eds., *Ritual Levity and Humor in South Asian Religions* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010).

extremely distressed. Determined to find a solution, she ends up making a deal with a lecherous shopkeeper, who agrees to give her the supplies she needs if she will spend the night with him. Krishnadas' wife tells the shopkeeper that after she has served her guests she will return to fulfill her end of the deal. Returning home, she bathes, prepares food, places *bhog* before Thakurji, and then presents the *mahāprasād*, or consecrated food offerings, to her Vaishnava guests. Then, in a delightful detail so characteristic of the world of the *vārtā*s, "she fed the cows with what was left over and for herself she took nothing."[99]

When Krishnadas returns home and learns about what has transpired, he is exceedingly pleased with his wife's actions: "When the woman told him what had come about, he prostrated himself before his wife and said: 'you are blessed, you have preserved our *dharma*'." Krishnadas insists that his wife fulfill her promise to the shopkeeper because "a Vaishnava must be true to her word." Krishnadas carries his wife on his own back through the muddy streets to the shopkeeper's home. When the shopkeeper demands to know how the woman's feet have remained dry in her journey,

[99] *Prasāda* and *mahāprasāda* (used interchangeably in the sectarian context) refer to materials that have been "tasted" or "consumed" by Krishna and "returned to devotees for consumption." As Andrea Marion Pinkney has written: "*prasāda* is a distinctively Indic expression of a relationally defined bond that conveys gratitude and mutuality" (Andrea Marion Pinkney, "*Prasāda*," in *Brill Encyclopedia of Hinduism*, edited by Knut A. Jacobsen (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 103). Peter Bennett beautifully describes the concept of *prasād* in the Pushtimarg when he writes: "*Prasada*, a token of Krishna's pleasure and happiness on receiving the love of his devotee, is also an edible manifestation of his grace and bliss which the devotee tastes, digests, and inwardly experiences. The process of consecration would appear to parallel that of aesthetic appreciation: *bhoga* as an expression of *bhava* is complemented by *prasada* as an embodiment of *rasa*. The giving and receiving of food provides a medium for enhancing and transforming experience. Initially, the pleasure is in the giving. But this pleasure is fully realized when the devotee retrieves the sacred leftovers. Exceptional mystical powers are attributed to *prasada*. By taking *prasada* the devotee is nourished by Krishna's grace and made aware of his innate capacity to experience the ecstasy of *lila*" (Bennett, "In Nanda Baba's House," 199).

Krishnadas' wife reveals the entire story. The shopkeeper, cursing his own birth, throws himself at the couple's feet, and gives Krishnadas' wife a new *sāṛī*, telling her: "you are my sister in *dharma.*"[100]

In an article on female figures in *puṣṭimārgīy* hagiography, Vasudha Dalmia argues that the narrative of Krishnadas and his wife shows that fidelity to the husband is less important than commitment to the Pushtimarg and that the female protagonist wields power in making independent decisions.[101] While Dalmia is correct to point out the narrative's comment on the primacy of dedication to the *sampradāy* over dedication to the norms of a women's duty to her husband, it is difficult to claim that this hagiographic sentiment points towards *actual* freedoms that women experienced during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Furthermore, female characters are not any more or less free from social and familial constraints, or from new sectarian constraints, than their male counterparts. Both male and female protagonists in the *vārtā*s are shown to struggle in their negotiations between familial and devotional duties. Thus, while the *vārtās* tell us that Vallabhacharya and Vitthalnath supported widows and prostitutes who wished to perform *sevā* and follow the Pushtimarg, *śāstrik* norms more or less stay intact.[102] This is particularly evident in certain elements of the *vārtā* texts, namely in Hariray's *Bhāvprakāś* commentary, which at one point equates *anyāśray* ("depending on another," that is, on any other deity than Krishna, or any other *guru* than Vallabhacharya or his

[100] Parīkh, *Caurāsī Vaiṣṇavan kī Vārtā* (2011), 370-372.

[101] Dalmia, "Women, Duty and Sanctified Space in a Vaiṣṇava Hagiography of the Seventeenth Century."

[102] For example, see Gadadhardas' *vārtā* in: Parīkh, *Caurāsī Vaiṣṇavan kī Vārtā* (2011), 98-93.

descendants) to female infidelity: "There is no impurity greater than *anyāśrāy*. Just as a woman's entire *dharma* leaves her if she abandons her own husband […] similarly a Vaishnava's *dharma* is destroyed if he indulges in *anyāśrāy*."[103] As we will find when we look at modern discussions of this and similar *vārtā*s in later chapters, both male and female devotees struggle to come to terms with the various layers of meaning and contradictions relating to social conduct and gender that arise in such narratives.

III d. Hariray's *Bhāvprakāś* and the *Tīn Janma kī Bhāvnā*

As previously noted, there are two distinct manuscript traditions of the *84VV*: one with, and one without the *Bhāvprakāś*. Today, published versions of the text based on manuscript traditions without Hariray's commentary are rather rare, and most readers accept the *Bhāvprakāś* as integral to the *84VV* and *252VV* as whole texts. Some modern Hindi and Gujarati versions do, however, simply merge the root text and *Bhāvprakāś*. As we will see in the following chapter, some modern editors and translators omit the *Bhāvprakāś* in their versions of the *84VV* or *252VV*, only to add new, contemporary commentaries, which mimic aspects of the *Bhāvprakāś*.[104] In manuscripts of the *84VV* and *252VV*, scribes will indicate the beginning and end of commentarial sections by using red ink. In printed versions of the texts in which the *Bhāvprakāś* appears, the editor will normally indicate the commentarial sections by printing them in font that is smaller than

[103] Parīkh, *Caurāsī Vaiṣṇavan kī Vārtā* (2011), 137-138.

[104] I have not seen this feature of elided root text and commentary in any Braj Bhasha or modern Hindi redactions or versions of the *84VV* or *252VV*, but have in both Gujarati and English versions. See, for example: Shyamdas, trans., *Eighty-four Vaishnavas* (Baroda: Shri Vallabha Publications, 1985).

the root text (see the Appendix for an example of this).[105]

The *Bhāvprakāś* functions within the *vārtā* narratives in several ways. First, the commentary provides further biographical details for each of the protagonists in the *84VV* and *252VV*. These biographical details can be either *laukik* or *alaukik* in nature. *Laukik* issues refer to such things as caste or birthplace, while *alaukik* details refer to the protagonists' roles in Krishna's *nitya līlā*. These two aspects of *vārtā* characters' lives (*laukik* and *alaukik*) are in fact essential to the structure of Hariray's *Bhāvprakāś* and relate to another common title for the commentary: the *Tīn Janma kī Bhāvnā*, or the "Recollection of the Three Lives."[106] The three lives refer to the protagonists' *laukik* and *alaukik* lives as well as to a third life-stage: the *laukik* condition of each character after he or she has encountered either Vallabhacharya or Vitthalnath and has entered the sectarian fold. While it is sometimes difficult to distinguish where the root text ends and Hariray's commentary begins, it is generally the case that the "first" and "third lives" are revealed in the *Bhāvprakāś*, which helps to explain and expand upon the events that unfold in the "second life" described in the root text.

In addition to naming all of the eighty-four and two hundred and fifty-two Vaishnavas as *daivī jīv*s, Hariray also assigns roles in *nitya līlā* to all of *vārtā*s' primary protagonists, as well as to Vallabhacharya and Vitthalnath. Vallabhacharya's *alaukik*

[105] For a brief study on the differences between the two recensions, see: Galina Rousseva-Sokolova, "Sainthood Revisited: Two Printed Versions of the *Lives of the Eighty-Four Vaishnavas* by Gokulnāth," in *Bhakti Beyond the Forest: Current Research of Early Modern Literatures in North India, 2003-2009*, edited by Imre Bangha (New Delhi: Manohar, 2012), 91-104.

[106] *Bhāvnā* can mean: "perception, consciousness"; "feeling; mood spirit; moral"; "mental process; recollection; imagination; premonition"; "thought; medication" (McGregor, *The Oxford Hindi-English Dictionary*, 766).

double is none other than Krishna's divine partner Swamini (*Svāminī*, that is, *Rādhā*), while Vitthalnath's double is Swamini's female companion, Chandravali. All other devotees are named as *sakhī*s ("female friends") of Swamini and Chandravali.[107] The devotee's life in *nitya līlā* and the characteristics of that divine life are sometimes directly connected to his or her life in the mundane world, and at other times are seemingly random. An example of how the devotee's life on earth is seen as a reflection of his or her position in *līlā* can be found in an account of Vallabhacharya's disciple Parvati from the *84VV*. In the opening portion of the *Bhāvprakāś*, Hariray writes that the Parvati was a *rājasī* devotee (that is, she was full of passion).[108] Parvati's divine double is a *sakhī* named Sucarita.[109] "She decorates her body a great deal, but from her pride in her beauty she fell down (*girī*) from *līlā*."[110] When she falls from *līlā*, Parvati loses knowledge of her *alaukik* role. In the *laukik* world Parvati performs *sevā* lovingly. However, one day she develops leprosy and feels great disgust and humiliation. "Then she recalled her

[107] The eight principal poets of the *sampradāy* (the *aṣṭachāp*), whose *vārtā*s appear in the *84VV* and *252VV*, are assigned roles as both *sakhī*s and as *sakhā*s ("male friends") in *līlā*. The implication is that these eight individuals had a special kind of spiritual insight, which allowed them to access to Krishna's *līlā* as *sakhī*s and *sakhā*s through devotional song.

[108] In the opening pages of the *84VV* and *252VV*, Hariray asserts that the eighty-four followers of Vallabhacharya were *nirguṇ* ("without qualities") and that Vitthalnath's two hundred and fifty-two devotees were *rājasī, tāmasī*, and *sātvikī*. These enumerations and the reference to the *guṇ*s ("qualities") are familiar to many Hindu, Jain, and Buddhist traditions. As noted in an earlier footnote, eighty-four is considered to be an auspicious number, in part because there are understood to be eighty-four *lakh* (84,000,000) categories of living beings, each of which is assigned a *guṇ*. The exemplary devotees of the tradition are representative of each of these categories. Even though Vallabhacharya's followers are said to have been *nirguṇ* Hariray still assigns them *guṇ*s.

[109] *Sucarita* can mean "right conduct" or "good behavior."

[110] Parīkh*, Caurāsī Vaiṣṇavan kī Vārtā* (2011), 53.

previous form as a *sakhī*." In recognition of her *alaukik* form she sends a letter to Vitthalnath who responds to the distressed devotee, telling her to free herself from worry because Thakurji will remove the illness. Indeed, after several months, Parvati's leprosy vanishes and she learns to perform *sevā* lovingly and without pride.

Whether or not there is clear continuity between a protagonist's *laukik* and *alaukik* characteristics, his or her role in *nitya līlā* is key to the theology of the *Bhāvprakāś* and to the root texts themselves. As Barz notes, "the bypassing of the ego to discover true identity as a transcendent woman, a *sakhī*, or as both a *sakhī* and a transcendent man, a *sakhā*, is the mystery that lies at the heart of the Pushtimarg as presented in the *84VV* (*Tīn Janma kī Līlā Bhāvnā Vālī*)."[111] Recognizing this "true identity," however, does not necessarily distance the devotee from her his or her *laukik* existence. It is the relationship between the devotee and his or her *svarūp* that creates a bridge between the two worlds. It is only when intimacy is achieved between a devotee

[111] Barz, "The *Caurāsī Vaiṣṇavan kī Vārtā* and the Theology of the Puṣṭimārg," 60. As I noted in my discussion of Vallabhacharya's *Subodhinī*, the concept of simultaneously maintaining a life in *līlā* and in the mundane world is also common to other Vaishnava traditions. The Gaudiya Vaishnava tradition developed a rather distinct practice, called *rāgānugā bhakti sādhana*, which was intended to help the devotee cultivate lasting participation in *līlā*. As David Haberman writes, *rāgānugā bhakti sādhana* is a religio-dramatic technique that aims at shifting worldly identity to one's spiritual double or "perfected form" (*siddha-rūpa*). For the Gaudiya Vaishnavas, as with the *puṣṭimārgīy* Vaishnavas, "salvation" is one's unending participation in Krishna's *līlā*, and "the skills of the actor are employed in pursuit of the true identity which allows such participation" (Haberman, *Acting As a Way of Salvation*, 4). While *puṣṭimārgīy* Vaishnavas never developed such a clearly defined process of cultivating one's divine self, several sectarian texts, including the *84VV*, explain that it is the very practice of *sevā* in the mundane world that creates a bridge, so to speak, to Krishna's *līlā*. Other such texts include Gopinath's Sanskrit *Sādhana-dīpikā*, and as well as the *Baḍe Śikṣāpatra*, attributed to Hariray. The *Śikṣāpatra* ("Teaching Letters") is a Sanskrit text with a Braj Bhasha commentary. The commentary is attributed to Hariray's brother, Gopeshvar. Together the root text and its commentary function as a sectarian manual on matters of *sevā*, the connection between *dharma* and practical behavior (*vyavahār*), and the treatment of anxiety (*cintā*).

and his or her *svarūp* that the deity acts in the *laukik* world as a speaking, loving, playful, sweet, and mischievous member of a devotee's family.

The second way in which the *Bhāvprakāś* functions in the *84VV* and *252VV* is to anticipate and quell readers' doubts about the seemingly dubious actions of the protagonists and to therefore smooth over theological tensions in the narratives. In this way, we are able to witness how Hariray himself struggles to make sense of how doctrine and practice, theological ideals, and biographical details all challenge and compliment each other through the narrative embodiment of devotees' lives. An example of this function of the *Bhāvprakāś* is found in an account from the *84VV*, when a devotee named Virbai is told by Thakurji to carry on with *sevā* even though she is in a state of impurity due to childbirth. Hariray is quick to justify the character's behavior. "Don't misunderstand," Hariray tells us, since "Virbai was much loved by Thakurji" and was given permission by the deity to carry on with *sevā*, her actions were neither "wicked nor impure."[112]

Another example of the *Bhāvprakāś*' justifying function is found in the *vārtā* of Krishnadas Adhikari. In the *vārtā*'s fifth episode we learn that Krishnadas has gone to Agra to collect provisions needed for the temple at Govardhan Hill in Braj. While in the bazaar, his attention is caught by the sight of a prostitute teaching her daughter to dance.

> The prostitute's daughter was a girl of around twelve who was extremely beautiful. Krishnadas was so impressed and charmed by that young prostitute's singing that he stopped his chariot right there, got down, and pushed his way through the crowd until he could gaze upon the beauty of the girl. He stood there for some time charmed by her song.

[112] Virbai's *vārtā* is normally the sixty-first account in the *84VV*. See: Parīkh, *Caurāsī Vaiṣṇavan kī Vārtā*, 331-333.

Here the *Bhāvprakāś* interrupts the narrative with the following comment:

> This episode may cause doubt, for some will wonder how Krishnadas, who was a faithful servant of Vallabhacharya, could be charmed by the song of a prostitute. Further doubts may arise when one recalls that even the charms and beauty of heavenly nymphs should not interest devotees like Krishnadas, who are completely drowned in their love for Krishna. And, on the topic of singers and prostitutes, Vallabhacharya wrote in his *Jalabheda*:
>
> *Singers who stay with prostitutes and other lowly people and become intoxicated and sing songs for their living are like dirty gutter water.*[113]

The commentary continues to explain how Vallabhacharya's treatise, the *Jalabheda*, describes the danger of taking the company of prostitutes and other debased individuals.[114] "So why," Hariray continues, "was Krishnadas, a person of great wisdom and a defender of *dharma*, so charmed by the singing of a prostitute? How could Krishnadas, who had appeared in the *laukik* world to assist in the instruction and uplift of all souls and who should be opposed even to looking at a fallen woman, be charmed by a prostitute?" All doubt, assures Hariray, will be dispelled by the following information. In the section that follows, the commentary explains how the prostitute was herself a *daivī jīv* who maintained a role in Krishna's *nitya līlā*.

Hariray again refers to the prostitute's *alaukik* role when the narrative tells us how the girl became so immersed in joy while singing for Shrinathji that she was released from her earthly body so that she could live eternally as her divine incarnation in *līlā*.

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[113] Parīkh, *Caurāsī Vaiṣṇavan kī Vārtā* (2011), 690-693.

[114] The *Jalabheda* is one of the sixteen treatises of Vallabhacharya's *Ṣoḍaśagrantha* anthology. The text describes different categories of souls in terms of different kinds of water. For more on the *Jalabheda*, see: Smith, "Vedic and Devotional Waters: The *Jalabheda* of Vallabhācārya."

Here Hariray again inserts a comment in order to rationalize the prostitute's liberation without ever having received proper sectarian initiation. "The initiation," the commentary reminds us, "may only be given by a male descendant of Vallabhacharya." However, because Vallabhacharya was enshrined in the heart of Krishnadas, the prostitute actually *did* receive proper initiation when Krishnadas taught her a verse of his poem to sing before the deity. "One might still, nevertheless, doubt that any person could enter into *līlā* without the aid of a *guru*," the commentary continues. Such doubt is dispelled by the fact that the girl was already a *daivī jīv* before she received initiation, and in *līlā* is a companion of Krishnadas' divine manifestation as Lalitaji, Swamini's foremost *sakhī*.

The episode as it exists without the *Bhāvprakāś* ends with a note about how Krishnadas was blessed by the grace of Krishna and was therefore able to provide the prostitute's daughter with liberation. Hariray on the other hand, rewrites the narrative through his intervening comments and by concluding the *vārtā* with a reminder about the correct ways in which to receive sectarian initiation. In this way, the commentary employs two distinct narrative strategies: first referring to Vallabhacharya's doctrines and then by using the *alaukik* life of the character to provide justification and causal explanation for a story that could potentially be read as transgressive to a *sampradāy* in the process of defining itself.

Hariray's *Bhāvprakāś* is not, however, the final word on the hagiographies. Rather, the commentary is one of several features of the *84VV* and *252VV* that provides a way for readers to enter into a dialogic and even argumentative relationship with the texts. Contemporary commentators openly contest Hariray's interpretations as well as

fellow devotees' and religious leaders' readings of the narratives, often coming to disparate conclusions about which behaviors are worthy of emulation. As one female sectarian leader in Ahmedabad put it: "Shri Harirayji's *Bhāvprakāś* does not always answer our questions about the eighty-four and two hundred and fifty-two Vaishnavas, but it does encourage us to ask how the *vārtā*s tell us about Shri Vallabhacharya's teachings and the application of these teachings to our own lives."[115]

Conclusion: The Implied Reader

So-called reader-response theorists of the 1960s-1970s proposed that it was in the reception of and response to a text that "meaning happens."[116] Wolfgang Iser, Stanley Fish and other such reader-response critics developed theories about reading largely in response to New Criticism theorists of the 1940s and 1950s, who maintained that all that one needed to know about a piece of literature was contained in the text itself. That is, according to New Criticism, a text can be viewed as an artifact and the practice of textual criticism can be approached as a philological science. In line with reader-response critics, I maintain that the "objectivity of the text is an illusion," and favor an approach, as this dissertation demonstrates, that is heavily reader-focused. However, Wolfgang Iser's notion of the "implied reader" still requires that we take close-readings of written texts seriously—that we find the ways in which these texts assert their own functions and make

[115] Personal Communication, August 25th, 2010.

[116] Iser, *The Act of Reading*, 9.

implicit assumptions about audience and what this audience knows or believes.[117]

The *84VV* and *252VV* both explicitly and implicitly state their intended function and their implied or ideal readers. We have already explored some of the ways in which Hariray's *Bhāvprakāś* implicitly invites readers into a dialogue with the texts. We might also recall the citation from the *Bhāvprakāś* that I presented at the beginning of this chapter in which Hariray asserts that the oral accounts, or *bhagavadvārtā* ("godly-discourse"), of the eighty-four Vaishnavas are the essence of Vallabhacharya's teachings. So who, ultimately, are the *real* ideal readers of *puṣṭimārgīy* hagiographies? They are not readers in the conventional sense of the word at all, but rather participants in discussion, members of a special kind of "interpretive community."[118] According to Hariray, discussing the *vārtā*s of Vallabhacharya's devotees, for whom the Pushtimarg was created, is what keeps the tradition alive and, "discourse on the Vaishnavas is to be understood to be supreme." Furthermore, the *vārtā*s themselves are dialogic—they are full of accounts of conversation between different figures (see examples of this in the Appendix). Hariray's *Bhāvprakāś* adds to the dialogic nature of the texts not only through its own dialogue with the root narratives, but also directly with the reader (e.g., "the reader might be wondering about what has just been reported" etc.).[119]

Part of what this means is that readers of the *vārtā*s must become familiar with the

[117] Ibid., 36.

[118] Stanley E. Fish, "Interpreting the *Variorum*," in *Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-Structuralism*, edited by Jane P. Tompkins (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), 182.

[119] The emphasis on *bhagavadvārtā* in *satsaṅg* is also depicted throughout the *vārtā*s. In these contexts, devotees are shown to gain greater understanding of sectarian *siddhānt*, but more importantly to gain heightened *bhāv*, which in turn strengthens bonds with Thakurji.

distinct grammar—or, more accurately, the distinct vocabulary—of the hagiographies. This vocabulary, for instance, indicates such details as the showing of intimacy with Thakurji (*sānubhāvatā janānā*) and distinguishes relationships between insiders and outsiders (e.g., *puṣṭimārgīy* verses *maryādāmārgīy*), the *laukik* from the *alaukik*, and the inherently sacred and the mundane (e.g., names that refer to sacred places appear with marks of reverence—Mathura, Krishna's birthplace appears as *Śrī Mathurājī* while the former Mughal capital Agra, would merely appear as *Āgrā*). While much is negotiable in the *vārtā*s and the discourse that surrounds them, these certain, and often subtle, aspects of the texts' vocabularies do not change. It is through these terms that the *vārtā*s—and indeed matters of everyday social and devotional life—continue to be discussed by living members of the *sampradāy*.

An exploration of the living tradition of *Vārtā Sāhitya* in the Vallabh Sampraday must therefore begin with a consideration of *vārtā* literature's genre, history, and relationship to the larger *puṣṭimārgīy* canon—that is, to the larger ecology of the textual tradition. The material covered in this chapter has provided a vital frame for understanding the ways in which contemporary devotees use *vārtā* literature as a platform from which to negotiate a variety of issues related to devotional affect and ritual and social conduct. The following chapters will show how modern readers and commentators have picked up where Hariray left off—adding ever-new layers of commentary to the *vārtā*s and asserting individual claims to sectarian belonging. The protagonists of the *vārtā*s, we will see, are not merely flat characters embedded in written texts—they live and breathe in the discussions, debates, and life-choices made by numerous devotees.

Chapter II

Historicizing Hagiography: *Puṣṭimārgīy* Self-Fashioning During the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries

Introduction

In Chapter One I introduced what has become the widely accepted canon of *Vārtā Sāhitya* and discussed the aesthetically distinct ways in which this literature presents *puṣṭimārgīy* history, canon, theology, ritual practice, and social and devotional relationships. I also described how the *84VV* and *252VV*, along with their corresponding *Bhāvprakāś* commentaries, exhibit, both in structure and content, the ways in which these texts' authors and redactors were in active dialogue with each other, with other texts, and with their intended audiences. The *vārtā*s, I argued, are thus dialogic texts, which inspire readers to engage in ongoing discussions and debate.

Building on these arguments, the following chapters consider how modern readers have received and analyzed *puṣṭimārgīy* hagiography in a variety of ways, forming what reader response critic Stanley E. Fish would call "interpretive communities."[1] For Fish, interpretive communities are "made up of those who share interpretive strategies not for reading (in the conventional sense) but for writing texts, for constituting their properties and assigning their intentions."[2] As the following chapters show, the strategies, ideals, and conventions of the *vārtā*s' interpretive communities have been influenced both by

[1] Fish, "Interpreting the *Variorum*," 182.

[2] Ibid., 182.

changes in the presentation of the physical texts as well as by shifts in historical context and devotional and social ideals.

This chapter focuses on how the *vārtā*s were central to the definition and identity of the *sampradāy* during the latter half of the nineteenth century. I first look at the social climate that led to a major court case known as the Maharaja Libel Case, during which the scriptural authority of the *vārtā*s and their representation of the *puṣṭimārgīy* community were called into question. Some scholars have argued that the Maharaja Libel Case, which ultimately led to ongoing public disputes over the Vallabh Sampraday's theological, moral, and historical foundations, marked the beginning of a rapid decline in the community.[3] While this difficult period certainly influenced the reception and presentation of *puṣṭimārgīy* literature and identity for decades to come, I reject the claim that the *sampradāy* was somehow left in a state of disrepair. As I argue in this chapter, one of the ways in which the *puṣṭimārgīy* community demonstrated resilience and worked to rebuild sectarian identity was through an active engagement with and re-articulation of the *sampradāy*'s hagiographic literature. This re-articulation worked in different ways, but often focused on historicizing hagiography through rhetorical devices in written commentaries on the *vārtā*s. One of the factors, practically speaking, that allowed for this use of commentary was the commercialization of the printing press and the presentation of the *vārtā*s as published books.

[3] For example, Saha, "Creating a Community of Grace"; Shodhan, "Legal Representations."

Part I: A Brief Social History of the Vallabh Sampraday in the Nineteenth Century

In addition to the commercialization of the printing press, which I discuss in the third section of this chapter, the nineteenth century was a significant period for the Vallabh Sampraday for two main reasons. First, it marked a time of growing tension over issues of authority between *puṣṭimārgīy* religious leaders and leading figures from their devotee base, which was primarily comprised of Gujarati merchants living in the Bombay Presidency.[4] Second, as tensions between religious and lay authorities came into conversation with larger questions about so-called "reform" movements and related debates over what constituted "Hinduism," the authenticity of the Vallabh Sampraday became, quite literally, a matter of public legal dispute. In what follows I briefly outline the social history that led to this nineteenth-century moment.

I a. The Vallabh Sampraday moves west

The Vallabh Sampraday's success in expanding from the region of Braj into western India during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and in sustaining itself in the region during the colonial period, had much to do with *puṣṭimārgīy* leaders' alliances with ruling elites. The *sampradāy* found generous patrons first within the Mughal empire,

[4] Both Gujarati trading and farming castes converted to the Pushtimarg. These caste groups included Bhatias, Lohanas, Banias, and Kanbis (Shodhan, "Legal Representations," 156). For an article on the important distinction between perceptions of merchant caste groups, see: Edward Simpson, "Why Bhatiyas are not "Banias" and Why this Matters: Economic Success and Religious Worldview Among a Mercantile Community of Western India," in *Divines Richesse: Religion et Économie en Monde Marchand Indien*, edited by Pierre Lachaier and Catherine Clémentin-Ojha (Paris: École Française d'Extrême-Orient, 2008), 91-111.

and then, as the empire began to decline, from Rajput kingdoms of western India.[5] *Vārtā* literature itself acknowledges these royal patrons, as well as the fact that the *sampradāy* attracted a considerable following of Gujarati merchant devotees whose financial support also helped to sustain the community from the seventeenth century onward.[6] I agree with Shandip Saha's suggestion that, in addition to providing spiritual satisfaction through direct *sevā* of Krishna in the home, *puṣṭimārgīy* theology also offered merchants a life-affirming religious view that was compatible with their caste organization and with occupational pursuits. Saha also suggests that by joining the *puṣṭimārgīy* fold, merchant devotees could enhance prestige and social mobility by following sectarian tenets such as vegetarianism, humility, and frugality, and by donating personal wealth in support of temple *sevā*.[7] While Mughal and Rajput leaders similarly patronized the *sampradāy* to gain merit, such patronage was also seen in terms of savvy statecraft.[8] This was particularly the case for Rajput elite, who, by the late seventeenth century could no longer rely on the external support of the Mughal empire. By patronizing, and often converting to the Pushtimarg, Rajput leaders strove to unite royal interests with those of wealthy

[5] For thorough studies of this process, see: Saha, "Creating a Community of Grace"; Richardson, "Mughal and Rajput Patronage of the Bhakti Sect of the Maharajas"; Peabody, *Hindu Kingship and Polity in Precolonial India*.

[6] See my discussion of the *Śrīnāthjī kī Prākaṭya Vārtā* in Chapter One. See also: Pauwels and Bachrach, "Victims or Victory Mongers?"; Saha, "The Movement of *Bhakti* along a North-West Axis."

[7] Saha, "A Community of Grace," 241.

[8] For further on this matter, see: Peabody, "In Whose Turban does the Lord Reside?"

merchant devotees.[9]

While the balance of power between "king, merchant, and temple" was always in flux, merchants' success in business ventures often determined the stability of local religious institutions. When the conditions of business were weak, merchants' temple donations decreased, which in turn influenced the attractiveness of a temple's resident deity. Fewer temple donations meant less elaborate celebrations of *puṣṭimārgīy utsav*s ("festivals") and temple *sevā*, which could lead to decreased temple attendance. Decreased temple attendance could undermine local bazaar economy, so much so that temple donations from local merchants would decline…and so on. As Norbert Peabody has discussed, such situations could eventually lead to the removal of a deity to another location, or to the perceived loss of a deity's potency.[10] Peabody's research suggests, then, that the gradual south-westward movement of a substantial number of *puṣṭimārgīy* religious leaders and their Krishna *svarūp*s (e.g., Shrinathji) from Braj into Rajasthan, and by the nineteenth century into the region then known as the Bombay Presidency, was connected to the successes, failures, and geographical movements of merchant devotees and their business ventures.[11]

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[9] According to Christopher A. Bayly, the prestige of *puṣṭimārgīy* deities and the wealth from merchant devotees could determine the success of Rajput ruling houses. For example, merchant wealth enabled some Rajput kingdoms to fund military expansion during the eighteenth century (Christopher A. Bayly, *Rulers Townsmen, and Bazaars: North Indian Society in the Age of British Expansion, 1770-1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 14-15).

[10] Peabody, "In Whose Turban Does the Lord Reside?," 751.

[11] I should clarify that not all or even most of the *navnidhi svarūp*s discussed in Chapter One were actually moved into Gujarat—many stayed in their temples in Rajasthan or Uttar Pradesh. The primary *mahārāj*s affiliated with these various deities, however, often did relocate to Gujarat or to the city of Bombay, leaving their temples in the care of family members or *sevak*s. While the

I b. The establishment of the Vallabh Sampraday in the Bombay Presidency

Why did merchant activity flourish in Gujarat to begin with? The western region had a longstanding tradition of commercial activity, which played a significant role in the economic structure of pre-colonial India. Gujarat's coastline—particularly harbor cities like Cambay—made the region an important center for both overseas and inland trade, which prospered under the Delhi and Gujarat Sultanates (thirteenth-sixteenth centuries). While those involved in such trade came from multiple *jāti*s and cut cross religious boundaries that included Parsis, Muslims, Jains, and Hindu religious groups, Gujarati merchants were often collectively referred to as *vaniyā*s (Baniyas). According to Saha, these diverse merchant groups shared more than common entrepreneurial goals: they shared skills in forming strong alliances with the ruling elite.[12] Such alliances allowed *vaniyās* to be remarkably resilient and to sustain themselves, and the religious communities they patronized, through political and economic upheavals that marked transitions from Sultanate to Mughal rule, Mughal to Maratha leadership (eighteenth century), and the expansion of British rule in the nineteenth century.

By the early nineteenth century, Bombay had overtaken cities like Cambay, Surat, and Ahmedabad as the primary commercial center in the region, which in turn attracted a large number of *puṣṭimārgīy* merchants and their religious leaders to the growing metropolis. The first *puṣṭimārgīy* temple was established in Bombay in 1811 when a

*vārtā*s ultimately claim that such movements relate to the *icchā* ("wish") of sectarian deities like Shrinathji, the narratives also acknowledge these social and political reasons for the community's establishment in western India.

[12] Saha, "Creating a Community of Grace," 268.

member of the Vallabh Kul, Gokulnath Maharaj (soon to be succeeded by Jivanlal Maharaj), settled in the city. By 1860 some seventy sectarian leaders, the majority of living *mahārāj*s during that period, had taken up residency in and around Bombay.[13] Bombay, the capital of the Bombay Presidency—a region that included some parts of today's state of Gujarat—was not only a major center of commercial trade, but also the center of British administration and intellectual exchange in western India.[14] As they had with ruling elites of the past, Gujarati merchants were quick to make alliances with the British in the region. In turn, British administrators' ability to maintain local stability depended heavily on the mercantile community for knowledge about their Indian subjects, and especially for the "indigenous capital" that was needed to finance projects of urban and social "reform."[15]

[13] Ibid., 297.

[14] The island of Bombay was given to the British crown by the Portuguese in 1661 and was then transferred to the East India Company in 1668. The city was the East India Company's most important possession in the western part of the subcontinent from the outset. It was thus naturally chosen as the capital of the Bombay Presidency. The parts of Gujarat that were *not* part of the Bombay Presidency were independent Princely States. After partition in 1947 the region of Gujarat remained politically attached to Maharashtra as Bombay State until the two states split along linguistic lines in 1960. For further on this, see: Edward Simpson and Aparna Kapadia, eds., *The Idea of Gujarat: History, Ethnography and Text* (New Delhi: Orient Blackswan, 2010).

[15] Saha, "Creating a Community of Grace," 268.

Part II: So-called Reform Movements and the Construction of "Hinduism" in the Bombay Presidency

So-called reform missions of the British in Bombay and across India varied widely.[16] Projects included the construction of infrastructure, aid relief (particularly during droughts, floods, and famines), the establishment of British-style educational institutions and hospitals, and a variety of initiatives focused on the social betterment of women (e.g., efforts to eradicate the practice of *satī* and to support widow re-marriage). At the same time, colonial leaders were keen to train civil servants in indigenous languages so that they could read Indian religious texts as a way in which to define and codify what they saw to be the major traditions of the sub-continent, namely Hinduism and Islam. These efforts, colonial leaders reasoned, would both facilitate the successful completion of social reform projects and also contribute to the creation of an efficient legal system that was grounded in local culture. Indian responses to and participation in the social agendas of the British were, of course, extremely diverse. These issues have been covered in several comprehensive studies.[17] Here I merely describe some of the

[16] For a discussion of why the terms "reform" and "revival" do not adequately describe the complex and diverse social, religious, and political changes and initiatives in colonial north India, see: Vasudha Dalmia, *The Nationalization of Hindu Traditions: Bhāratendu Hariśchandra and Nineteenth-century Banaras* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997), 5-12.

[17] For example, see: Brian K. Pennington, *Was Hinduism Invented?: Britons, Indians, and the Colonial Construction of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Esther Block ed., *Rethinking Religion in India: The Colonial Construction of Hinduism* (New York: Routledge, 2011); Gauri Vishwanathan, *Outside the Fold: Conversion, Modernity and Belief* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998); Vasudha Dalmia, *Orienting India: European Knowledge Formation in the 18th and 19th Centuries*; S.C. Crawford, *Ram Mohan Roy: Social, Political and Religious Reform in 19th Century India* (New Delhi: Three Essays Collective, 2003); and Sumit and Tanika Sarkar, eds., *Women and Social Reform in Modern India: A Reader* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008).

ways in which merchant communities responded to the social climate in the Bombay Presidency, noting especially how these responses influenced the relationship between *puṣṭimārgīy* religious and lay leaders. Next we will turn to how the Pushtimarg was put in the spotlight in the larger debate over what constituted "authentic" Hinduism, and how the *vārtā* hagiographies were targeted as the epitome of all that was heterodox about the *sampradāy*.

II a. Shifts in patronage and growing tensions amongst religious and lay authority

As Aarti Bhalodia has argued in her dissertation on mercantile philanthropy in colonial Gujarat, many merchant groups sought to improve their status and reputation (*ābrū*) in society by contributing to both British and indigenous reform initiatives (which were not, of course, always mutually exclusive).[18] As Bhalodia describes, trading castes increasingly began to favor educational philanthropy as a way of "bettering" both their caste-based and religious communities.[19] While giving directly to one's own religious community continued to be a means of increasing one's *ābrū*, the relationship between religious and lay authorities had also begun to shift, reflecting to the broader climate of social and religious "reform."[20]

As they had in the past, *puṣṭimārgīy mahārāj*s relied on financial donations from

[18] For further discussion of *ābrū*, see: Douglas E. Haynes, *Rhetoric and Ritual in Colonial India: The Shaping of a Public Culture in Surat City* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 56-58; David Hardiman, *Feeding the Baniya: Peasants and Usurers in Western India* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 74-79.

[19] Aarti Bhalodia, "Princes, Diwans and Merchants: Education and Reform in Colonial India" (PhD diss., University of Texas at Austin, 2012), 249.

[20] Christin E. Dobbin, *Urban Leadership in Western India*: *Politics and Communities in Bombay City, 1840-1885* (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), 22-45.

merchant devotees for the material upkeep of their religious establishments. Financial donations were often kept in trusts, which were then distributed to the community's various *mahārāj*s and their family members who maintained sectarian temples—both in Bombay and in other parts of India. Because of the prominence of *mahārāj*s among the wider merchant community of Bombay, it had also become common for non-*puṣṭimārgīy* merchants of certain caste groups to financially support the material welfare of the *sampradāy*. For example, leaders of the Kapol-Bhatia caste group, which dominated cloth market, were reported to have paid *lāgā* (trade levies) to *mahārāj*s and to have publicly honored the leaders' authority by closing their own shops in the event of births, deaths, or marriages in the Vallabh Kul.[21] While many merchant leaders maintained that sincere devotion was expressed and that *ābrū* was gained through maintaining such relationships, others began to criticize the *mahārāj*s, financial dependence on lay devotees. Those in opposition openly chastised fellow devotees for blindly supporting the *mahārāj*s, for extravagant spending on life-cycle events, and for the singing of "superstitious songs" and the performance of flamboyant rituals during sectarian festivals such as *holī* and

[21] Noshirwas A. Thoothi, *The Vaishnavas of Gujarat* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1935), 95, footnote 2; Shodhan, "Legal Representations," 166. In addition to money, the *lāgā* could also include goods such as sugar, saffron, or books. According to Shodhan, such details became available, starting in 1863, via annual account reports published by Bhatia caste groups ("Legal Representations," 165-166). *Mahārāj*s also relied on caste authority to exercise power in other ways. In 1855, for example, after Bombay-based members of the Vallabh Kul became embroiled in a dispute with the local Shaivite community, *mahārāj*s used Bhatia *seṭh*s to organize a boycott against Shaivite Brahmin institutions and businesses. *Puṣṭimārgīy* merchants and other *vaniyā*s who refused the boycott were ostracized (e.g., they were in turn subject to boycotts against their own local businesses) (Shodhan, "Legal Representations," 174-175). Other instances show how *mahārāj*s exercised power through caste leaders and also how *mahārāj*s were called upon to settle disputes within caste groups. At the same time, however, caste leaders themselves also held a certain degree of power over *mahārāj*s. As Shodhan argues, caste and religious authorities worked together to form a "religious polity" ("Legal Representations," 194-250).

annakūṭ.[22] None of this was unique to the Vallabh Sampraday, nor to the Bombay Presidency. The effort to sanitize so-called folk practices was widespread in India during the nineteenth century and was intimately connected to broader projects of socio-religious "reform."[23] Merchant reformers specifically, however, targeted the *mahārāj*s as the cause for such behaviors. When allegations that several *mahārāj*s had engaged in sexual misconduct surfaced in 1855, Bhatia leaders proposed banning their womenfolk from visiting temples and from meeting with male religious leaders. Caste leaders lobbied Jivanlal Maharaj, the then most senior member of the Vallabh Kul in Bombay, to use his power to restrain fellow *mahārāj*s from "indulging in sexual excess" and from hoarding "excess wealth."[24] In 1861, anonymous articles, which further decried *puṣṭimārgīy* leaders' abuse of power over their devotees, began to appear in a widely circulated Gujarati newspaper known as the *Rāst Goftār* (the "Herald of Truth").[25] One *Rāst Goftār* article provocatively called Bhatia caste leaders "slaves" of the *mahārāj*s.

[22] Shodhan, "Legal Representations," 174-175.

[23] Amrita Shodhan, "Women in the Maharaj Libel Case: A Re-examination," *Indian Journal of Gender Studies* 4, no. 2 (1997): 123-239.

[24] Ibid., 166-169; Saha, "Creating a Community of Grace," 285. According to one report from the *Times of India* on February 1st, 1862, the collection from levies paid by the Bhatia community amounted to 50,000 rupees (approximately 800 US dollars today, in 2013) for one senior *mahārāj* of Bombay alone.

[25] The *Rāst Goftār* was founded in 1854 by Dadabhai Naoroji (1825-1917), a Parsi intellectual and political and social leader. The newspaper was founded with the intention of addressing those in the Parsi community whom Naoroji felt no longer provided the leadership necessary at a time of great social change. By 1861 the paper was used for broader debates about social change. For more on the newspaper, see: Jesse S. Palsetia, *The Parsis of India: Preservation of Identity in Bombay City* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 190-196. For further on Dadabhai Naoroji, see: Dinyar Patel, "Grand Old Man: Dadabhai Naoroji and the Evolution of the Demand for Swaraj" (Forthcoming PhD diss., Harvard University).

That same year, a series of anonymous articles, which harshly criticized lay reformers, were published in a popular Gujarati daily. In response, Lakhmidas Khimji, one of the more vocal *puṣṭimārgīy* reformers who had been named in the articles, sued the editor of the daily.[26] Public criticism of the *sampradāy* only intensified after this incident, and came to a head the following year.

II b. Karsondas Mulji's *Satya Prakāś*

In 1862 tensions between *puṣṭimārgīy* religious leaders and self-proclaimed reformers came under the national spotlight during what came to be known as the Maharaja Libel Case.[27] The fodder for the case was the polemic writing of Karsondas Mulji (1832-1875), a leading Gujarati reformer of the Kapol-Bhatia community and graduate of Elphinstone College. In the latter half of the nineteenth century, Elphinstone was by far the most prestigious English-medium institution of higher learning in Bombay (if not in all of India), and was focused on training an elite group of (mostly wealthy) Indians in the arts and sciences, as well as in European philosophy and literature. Although merchant communities were not directly attached to Elphinstone, several prominent individuals with merchant backgrounds, including Mulji and the Parsi reformer Dadabhai Naoroji (1825-1917), were trained in the institution. Moreover, the values of the university were formative in the broader sentiments of so-called reform that characterized the social landscape of Bombay during the period. In 1855 Mulji founded a Gujarati newspaper, the *Satya Prakāś* ("The Illumination of the Truth"), in which he

[26] Shodhan, "Legal Representations," 174.

[27] For a concise account of the Maharaja Libel Case, see: David L. Haberman, "On Trial: The Love of Sixteen Thousand Gopees," *History of Religions* 33, no. 1 (1993): 44-70.

wrote regularly on the alleged misconduct of the *mahārāj*s. Mulji claimed that the *sampradāy*'s leaders blatantly abused their authority as *guru*s by having illicit sexual relationships with female devotees and using temple donations for their own ends.[28] Mulji went further, however: he attacked the authenticity of the *sampradāy* itself, claiming that the Pushtimarg was a corrupt deviation from a more ancient and authentic form of Hinduism that was grounded in the *Veda*s.

Many *puṣṭimārgīy* leaders and devotees responded to Mulji's accusations, but the most vocal was Jadunath Maharaj of the *sampradāy*'s Sixth House.[29] Enraged at the allegations, Jadunath Maharaj relocated from Surat to Bombay to personally challenge Mulji in a series of debates.[30] The debates were held through a society that Jadunath Maharaj had himself established—the *Vaiṣṇav Dharma Prasāraka Sabhā*—and were printed in several issues of the *Satya Prakāś.* The debates reached a boiling point when Mulji published the most damning of his articles, "The Primitive Religion of the Hindus and the Present Heterodox Opinions."[31] In the article Mulji discussed how the *Purāṇa*s

[28] For a broader discussion of how *mahārāj*s were accused of sexual relations with and sexual abuse of female devotees, see: Shodhan, "Women in the Maharaj Libel Case: A Re-examination."

[29] Jadunath Maharaj was himself considered to be a liberal and forward-thinking leader, who supported "reform" causes such as girls' education in Gujarat (Shodhan, "Legal Representations," 159).

[30] Shodhan, "Legal Representations," 177.

[31] The article, which was first published on October 21st 1860, can be found in: Karsondas Mulji, *History of the Sect of Maharajas, or Vallabhacharyas in Western India* (London: Trübner & Co., 1865), 172-175. The text was first published anonymously by Mulji and contains his own reading of *puṣṭimārgīy* literature and practices, citations from the 1862 trial and the trial's final judgments. The trial's transcript was printed by India's Supreme Court: *Maharaja Libel Case Including Bhattia Conspiracy Case, No. 12047 of 1861, Supreme Court Plea Side: Jadunathjee*

predicted that in the *kaliyug* false religions would arise. There could therefore be no doubt that all medieval sects such as the Dadupanthis and Ramanandis, but most of all the sect of Vallabhacharya, were heterodox. Mulji's proclamation was in direct response to Jadunath Maharaj, who had suggested during one of their debates that the "original teachings" of Hindu *dharma* could have grown into different, but related paths. "The course of religion and morals," wrote Mulji, "must be one only." No other "sectaries have ever perpetrated such shamelessness, subtility, immodesty, rascality, and deceit as have the sect of the Maharajas."[32] Mulji's attack notably mentioned Jadunath Maharaj by name. In response, Jadunath Maharaj filed a suit for libel and the case went to the Supreme Court.

II c. The Maharaja Libel Case

The Maharaja Libel Case created a sensation across the subcontinent, receiving coverage in both Indian language and English newspapers, including the *Bombay Gazette* and the *Times of India*. While sectarian leaders, particularly those based in Nathdwara, had taken community conflicts to colonial (and pre-colonial) courts in previous decades (and would continue to do so well after 1862), the Maharaja Libel Case was unique in that it led to a public, legal definition of the *sampradāy* that directly challenged the ways in which a majority of *puṣṭimārgīy* leaders and devotees understood their own religious

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Bizrattanjee Maharaj Vs. Karsondass Mooljee and Nandabhai Rustamji (Bombay: D. Lukhmidass, 1911).

[32] Mulji, *History of the Sect of Maharajas*, 94-95.

community.[33] The context of putting an Indian religious tradition under legal scrutiny in the Bombay courts was not, however, unique as such. In 1866, just several years after the Maharaja Libel Case, another Gujarati merchant-based community—an Ismaili Muslim group known as the Khojas—also went to court to defend their leadership and status as "authentically Muslim."[34] The Maharaja Libel case and others like it left many of the tensions over lay and religious authority that arose during the nineteenth century unresolved and polarized—a point to which we will return in Chapter Three. The *vārtā*s, we will see, lay at the center of the Libel Case and featured prominently in the community's response to the three-month long trial and its aftermath.[35]

While Mulji was found guilty of libel based on legal technicalities, the case ultimately resulted in a grotesque caricature of the Pushtimarg as an orgiastic and hedonistic tradition presided over by degenerate and sexually deviant religious leaders and overly emotional and weak devotees.[36] Moreover, by the end of the trial, the British

[33] For further on other court cases that involved members of the *sampradāy*, see: Saha, "Creating a Community of Grace," 220-257; 257-316.

[34] For a comprehensive study of this court case, known as the Aga Khan Case, see: Teena Purohit, *The Aga Khan Case: Religion and Identity in Colonial India* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013).

[35] Likewise, the *ginān*s, the primary religious texts of the Khojas, formed the basis of the judge's decision. It is noteworthy that when it came to issues of so-called reform, merchant groups were supportive of each other's endeavors. During the Maharaja Libel Case, for instance, Khoja reformers wrote sympathetically to support Karsondas Mulji's criticisms of the *mahārāj*s (Purohit, *The Aga Khan Case*, 29).

[36] Shandip Saha, "From Vaiṣṇavas to Hindus: The Redefinition of the Vallabha Sampradaya in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries" (Paper presented at the International Conference for Early Modern Literature in North India, Shimla, India, August 3rd-5th, 2012). Mulji's guilt was based on the fact that he had made accusations against Jadunath Maharaj without having had any material evidence that the plaintiff himself had engaged in either financial

judge, Sir Matthew Sausse, had determined that the doctrines of the Vallabh Sampraday were clearly in contradiction to the "ancient Hindu religion":

> The Mahārājās, however, appear upon the evidence to have undoubtedly availed themselves of the existence of those impressions to gratify licentious propensities of love of gain. These doctrines and practices are opposed to what we know of the original principles of the ancient Hindu religion which are said to be found in the Veds. They recognize no incarnations, but the well known *avatār* and the Hindu code of law and morals equally inculcate chastity in females before marriage, and fidelity in the marriage state. Therefore, so far as we may be called upon to express an opinion upon this part of the plea, the defendant has successfully shown that the doctrines of the Vallabhāchārya sect are in those respects contrary to those of the ancient Hindu religion.[37]

In arguing that the Vallabh Sampraday was a heterodox tradition, the defendant and his lawyers relied on the testimonies of seven witnesses and of the plaintiff himself, and by presenting a selection of *puṣṭimārgīy* texts in English translation, which were all read aloud in court. Among these texts were the *84VV* and *252VV*. The hagiographies, which are mentioned over a dozen times in the trial's transcript, were essentially determined to exemplify the sect's institutionalized immorality and to epitomize all that was corrupt about Krishna-centered *bhakti* and Vaishnavism in general.

II d. The centrality of the *vārtā*s during the trial

The first extended mention of the *vārtā*s occurred on the third day of the trial (Tuesday, January 28th, 1862), when a merchant initiate of the Vallabh Sampraday, Runchor Munjee, was questioned as a witness. In a rather rambling account of his travels

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or sexual misconduct. Nonetheless, Mulji's accusations were also determined to have been made with "just cause" because they were grounded in a concern for "social morality." Further, based on testimonies given by a selection of witnesses (including Jadunath Maharaj's medical doctor), the plaintiff *was* found to have been guilty of "immoral behavior" (Saha, "Creating a Community of Grace," 301).

[37] Mulji, *History of the Sect of Maharajas,* 82 (Appendix).

and pilgrimages, his meetings with various *mahārāj*s, and his understanding of Brahmanism and "gooroos," Munjee states that he has read the "story of the 84 Vyshnavs, also the story of the 252" (referring to the *84VV* and the *252VV*). He goes on to say that he is not familiar with any of the publications of the plaintiff, Jadunath Maharaj, but has read the "story of Krishnadass carrying his wife on his shoulders for the purpose of her fulfilling an adulterous engagement which she had made with another Bania."[38] At this point, nothing more specific is explained about the details of the "story of Krishnadass," which refers to the *84VV* narrative about Krishnadas and his wife that we considered in Chapter One. Here Mr. Anstey, the defendant's lawyer, interrupts the witness to ask the following: "Is the conduct of the husband approved or censured in the book?" According to the trial's transcript, the following exchange unfolds:

> Mr. Bayley [the plaintiff's lawyer] objects to the question being put; his learned friend might as well examine the witness on the contents of the Bible.
>
> The objection was overruled. The conduct of the husband, the wife and the third party in the story is praised. The good faith of the wife to her promise [to meet the "Bania"] is particularly praised.

The witness goes on to admit that: "not being acquainted with the Shastras, I cannot say whether or not these stories are repugnant to religion or morality in one sense."[39] When the witness then tries to explain more accurately the religious and moral intentions of the narrative, the judge, Sir Joseph Arnould interjects, saying: "I don't think

[38] Ibid., 143-144.

[39] Ibid., 143.

it is worth following it up. It is a story without a moral after all!"[40]

In the above exchange it hardly needs to be pointed out that the self-deprecating witness passively agrees with the judge by claiming that he himself is not familiar with the "Shastras"—that is, the body of Sanskrit literature that was increasingly favored by British administrators as definitive on "Hindu" law and moral codes. Even when Munjee tries to clarify his reading of the *vārtā* narrative by stating that, "the moral of the story is that all three parties were true to their faith," the Judge brushes off any further analysis.[41]

Towards the end of the trial Mr. Anstey, addressing the court on behalf of the defendant, summarized the witnesses' presentations of *puṣṭimārgīy* literature:

> Some of the witnesses have clearly stated that the old Shastras have been *pro tanto* superseded by the doctrines of stories such as those of the 252 and 84 [Vaishnavas]. Whether they are allegorical or not, is a matter of little moment: the plaintiff himself did not dare call them allegorical, but said they were given as examples. [Therefore,] according to him, adulterine love is the most appropriate where with to approach the Almighty.[42]

The complexity and diversity of the *vārtā* canon, the theological and devotional positions it projects, and the connections between the *vārtā*s and other sectarian texts (including the *Veda*s and *śāstrik* discourse itself), are never acknowledged during the trial. "The old Shastras," the court had determined, had been replaced with the *vārtā*s, which were texts that demonstrated the sect's inherent heterodoxy and immorality. Thus it was under the colonial legal system that the multiple, albeit often contested, sources of

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[40] Ibid., 294-295.

[41] The episode that witness Munjee refers to is traditionally the seventy-fifth narrative from the *84VV* (*Kṛṣṇadās strī puruṣ kī vārtā*), which we examined in Chapter One.

[42] Mulji, *History of the Sect of Maharajas*, 372-373. The judge also stated that: "If the Shastras enjoined the offering of women, I would believe in the doctrine!" (Ibid., 182).

religious authority within the Vallabh Sampraday were rendered irrelevant in the public eye. The "Hindu-ness" of *puṣṭimārgīy* vernacular texts—and indeed of the *sampradāy* itself—was the main issue at stake, and could now be defined based on the knowledge of Orientalist scholars and colonial experts, rather than by traditional forms of either religious or lay authority. The court's assessment of *puṣṭimārgīy* texts and practices was, of course, far from definitive. As it always had, sectarian identity would continue to be negotiated through ongoing debate, particularly debate specific to religious texts. Interlocutors in such debates, however, did find it necessary to directly or indirectly respond to the court's accusations and to the various issues it had raised.

II e. Redefining Vaishnava identities in the aftermath of the Maharaja Libel Case

In the decades following the Maharaja Libel Case, the religious, historical, and moral authenticity of the Vallabh Sampraday would continue to be challenged by those who sought to define "Hinduism" in terms of specific texts and practices. In 1868, for instance, a former temple administrator of the Shrinathji *havelī* in Nathdwara, who had taken the somewhat mysterious pseudonym Blakatananda (*Blakaṭānanda*), authored a text called *Vallabh Chal Kapaṭ Darpaṇ athavā Vallabh Kul kā Ciṭṭhā,* which criticizes the Vallabh Kul's "moral turpitudes." Blakatananda, who distributed his text widely throughout the Bombay Presidency, also objects to the *sampradāy*'s relationship to Shrinathji—alleging that the *svarūp* was in fact originally a tantric image of Bhairav worshipped by Bengali Vaishnavas and forcibly appropriated by Vitthalnath.[43]

In 1875, Dayanand Saraswati, a self-proclaimed *ṛṣi* of Vedic revival and founder

[43] Vaudeville, "Multiple Approaches to a Living Hindu Myth: The Lord of the Govardhan Hill," 221.

of the Arya Samaj, also launched a vigorous attack against the community, which he outlined in a pamphlet *Vallabhācārya Mat Khaṇḍan* ("The Denouncement of the Doctrine of Vallabhacharya").[44] After circulating the pamphlet in Bombay, Saraswati went on, as he writes in his autobiography, to "Rajkot and then to Ahmedabad and preached (Vedic) *dharma* there. […] May the true knowledge of the *Vedas* and *Shastras* dawn upon the people, so that the country may lead to progress and prosperity."[45]

Although not all nineteenth-century interlocutors in the debate over "authentic Hinduism" sought to assert the scriptural authority and orthodoxy of the *Veda*s, for Saraswati and many others asserting the primacy of the *Veda*s became the leading cause of the time.[46] While it is often assumed that Saraswati referred to the *Veda*s as singularly authoritative, he in fact spoke about " '*Veda* and *śāstra*' in close conjunction; together they are the 'Supreme Authority'."[47] That is, Saraswati did accept *smṛti* ("that which is remembered," or tradition) alongside *śruti*. For Saraswati *smṛti* included the great epics, the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata*, but definitively excluded the *Purāṇas*, which he

[44] For an excellent account and close reading of Dayanand Saraswati's writing, see: Timothy S. Dobe, "Dayānanda Sarasvatī as Irascible *Ṛṣi*: The Person and Performed Authority of a Text," *Journal of Hindu Studies* 4 (2011): 79-100.

[45] K.C. Yadav, ed., *The Autobiography of Dayanand Saraswati* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1987), 56. It is worth noting that a large number of early converts into the Arya Samaj in Bombay were members of Bhatia caste groups—many of whom came from traditionally *puṣṭimārgīy* families (Saha, "Creating a Community of Grace," 279; Dalmia, *The Nationalization of Hindu Traditions*, 383-4).

[46] Debendranath Tagore's Brahmo Samaj, for example, did *not* refer to the primacy of the *Veda*s in its articulation of Hinduism.

[47] Dobe, "Dayānanda Sarasvatī as Irascible *Ṛṣi*," 81.

thought to be "most absurd."[48] Of course for Vaishnava sects like the Vallabh Sampraday, the *BhP* was not only primary scripture, but was also considered to be on par with the *Veda*s. This, asserted Saraswati, led to idol worship, textual deviations, and all sorts of moral corruptions that were brought into the spotlight during the Maharaja Libel Case. It was degenerate idol-worshipping traditions like the Vallabh Sampraday, Saraswati claimed, that directly enabled British imperialism.[49]

A somewhat different attack on the *puṣṭimārgīy* community occurred during a series of events that began in 1864 when Maharaja Ram Singh II (1835-1880) of Jaipur, at the advice of his *smārta-śaiva* Brahmin advisers, accused all of the city's Vaishnava communities of *pāṣaṇḍa* ("heresy"). Although with rather different goals than Saraswati, the newly identified *smārta-śaiva* Dharma Sabha of Jaipur similarly sought to assert a definitive "Hindu *dharma*."[50] In this case, the Vaishnava *sampradāy*s of Jaipur were deemed heretical because they refused to abide by all of the following: 1) the "strict rules of *dharmaśāstra*," 2) the "cult of the Five deities" with Shiva at the middle, and 3) and Shankara's *advaita* interpretation of *Vedānta*. Following the Shankara tradition meant accepting that *śruti* alone was the source of all knowledge and that *smṛti* was only authentic insofar as it was in "direct agreement with the texts of the Vedic revelation."[51] As we know from Chapter One, the *śuddhādvaita* philosophical system of

[48] Ibid., 82.

[49] Ibid., 84.

[50] Catherine Clémentin-Ojha, "A Mid-nineteenth-century Controversy over Religious Authority," in *Charisma and Canon*, edited by Vasudha Dalmia, Angelika Malinar, and Martin Christof. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 187.

[51] Ibid., 184-187.

Vallabhacharya was vehemently opposed to this and to other aspects of Shankara's interpretation of *Vedānta*. Furthermore, Vallabhacharya and his descendants were committed to using the *BhP* to assert the supremacy of Krishna over all other deities. According to Catherine Clémentin-Ojha, this, and similar conflicts of the time, provided Vaishnava leaders of various *sampradāy*s with an opportunity to collectively defend, and in fact to unite, their "theological convictions," while still asserting sectarian difference. In the case of the Jaipur controversy, Vaishnava leaders did this by claiming allegiance to the *śruti*s, *smṛti*s, *dharmaśāstra*s, and *varṇāśramadharma*—all concepts that were rapidly becoming central to the articulation of a distinctly modern expression of Hinduism as *sanātana-dharma* ("eternal religion").[52]

Paying allegiance to *sanātana-dharma* and a collective Vaishnava identity did not necessarily mean that religious leaders and devotees sought to dilute or discard sectarian specific identities, practices, or literature.[53] It did, however, mean that *puṣṭimārgīy*

[52] Ibid., 183-201.

[53] It is noteworthy that many Vaishnava sects, including the Pushtimarg, were concurrently followed and patronized by former generations of Jaipur royalty during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Moreover, the debate over which sects Rajput elites in Jaipur and elsewhere would patronize and recognize as legitimate had been going on for over a century. James Hare discusses this issue in his dissertation on the *Bhaktamāl* (a late sixteenth- or early seventeenth-century hagiographical text that accounts for figures across several communities) and Priyadas' *Bhaktirasabodhinī* commentary on the text (composed in 1712). According to Hare, one of the ways in which Priyadas' commentary re-inscribed the boundaries of *bhakti*, was through a heightened focus on *sampradāy*s—several of which he identifies as legitimate in his text (James P. Hare, "Garland of Devotees: Nābhādās' *Bhaktamāl* and Modern Hinduism" (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2011). Monika Horstmann describes the Ramanandi tradition of which Priyadas was a part as: "a fold of Vaiṣṇavaites who try to encompass both the Vaiṣṇava orthodoxy and the heterodox movements represented by some of the great *sant*s whom Nābhā [the *Bhaktamāl*'s author] boldly classified as disciples of Rāmānand…" ("The Rāmānāndīs of Galtā (Jaipur, Rajasthan)," in *Multiple Histories: Culture and Society in the Study of Rajasthan*, edited by Lawrence A. Babb, Varsha Joshi, and Michael Meister (Jaipur: Rawat Publications,

leaders of the late nineteenth century felt compelled to re-assess and re-assert what, exactly, constituted the sectarian canon. Indeed the Braj Bhasha *vārtā*s, which were so vigorously attacked in the Maharaja Libel Case, were claimed by many within the community to be inaccurate representations of Vallabhacharya's "original teachings."[54] Both Jadunath Maharaj and Govardhanlal Maharaj (Nathdwara's leading member of the Vallabh Kul during the 1860s), for instance, responded to reformers' accusations by conceding that certain *mahārāj*s and their devotees had indeed "turned away from proper conduct," which had disabled them from properly following or teaching the Pushtimarg. Such leaders and their lay supporters proposed that members of the Vallabh Kul actively remake their image by giving "proper spiritual advice" to devotees, and by opening religious schools which would educate the community on Vallabhacharya's Sanskrit teachings and the *BhP*—texts that were claimed to be in "direct accordance with Vedic scripture."[55] Other sectarian leaders, such as Pandit Gattulalji and Devakinandacarya, engaged in a series of public lectures on *guru-śiṣya* ("*guru*-student") relationships.

2002), 147). By the early eighteenth century, though, this position had fallen from royal favor: "Mahārājā Savāī Jaisingh [sic] (or, Jaisingh II; r. 1700-1743) wished to enforce his own vision of Hindu kingship and pursued in his state a project of defining and organizing Hindu religion, its institutions and representatives. It had three main aspects which had to be kept in balance: (1) He received and performed the ancient Vedic sacrifices; (2) he put the Hindu ritual on a Smārta Vaiṣṇava basis and (3) he wanted fully to integrate Vaiṣṇava bhakti orders into the system" (Ibid., 159). As Hare writes, the Vaishnava *sampradāya*s, then, had to establish their orthodox *bona fides* by demonstrating that they operated "in accordance with the tenets of the four established Vaiṣṇava orders" (Hare, "Garland of Devotees," 131; Horstmann, "The Rāmānāndīs of Galtā," 160). For further on the history of Vaishnava sects' assertions of distinction and unity, see: John Stratton Hawley, "The four *sampradāys*: ordering the religious past in Mughal North India," *South Asian History and Culture* 2, no.2 (2011): 160-183.

[54] Shodhan, "Legal Representations," 245.

[55] Saha, "Creating a Community of Grace," 311.

Devakinandacarya also gave a series of lectures on themes related to "Vaishnava *dharma*" and *sanātana-dharma*, during which he told devotees to avoid vernacular texts that might be misread as condoning morally transgressive behavior.[56] While vernacular literature, was, for a time, truly at risk of losing its status as primary *puṣṭimārgīy* scripture, the *vārtā*s would again be recognized as authoritative texts in new forms and through new mediums.

Part III: Rearticulating *Puṣṭimārgīy* Identity through *Vārtā* Publication and Written Commentary

Next we turn to how lay followers of the Vallabh Sampraday responded in different ways to the changing social climate of the late nineteenth century. After looking at the spread of the *vārtā*s through the print revolution and the nationalization of Hindi-Vaishnava literature, we turn to the structural changes that occurred when the texts emerged as printed books. Finally, we consider several late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century publications of and written commentaries on *vārtā* texts, which show how modern authors were culturally authorizing *puṣṭimārgīy* literature in new ways.

III a. Harishchandra, the canonization of Hindi literature, and the print revolution

Bharatendu Harishchandra (1850-1885) was a leading Hindi literary figure, publicist, patron of the arts, and merchant follower of the Vallabh Sampraday who lived

[56] Shital Sharma, "Negotiating Modernity" (Paper presented at the 42nd Annual Conference on South Asia, Madison, Wisconsin, October 17th-20th, 2013).

and wrote in the city of Banaras.[57] His writing, the bulk of which was published a little over a decade after the Maharaj Libel Case, heavily influenced the revival of *puṣṭimārgīy* vernacular literature and helped to re-shape sectarian identity during the nineteenth century. While Harishchandra, like other Vaishnava reformers of his time, was critical of what he saw to be a decline in the *sampradāy*'s moral leadership, his methods of addressing needed change did not participate in the "Sanskritization" of the tradition. Instead, Harishchandra used Hindi literature to champion a brand of a "nationalized Vaishnavism" from "within the ranks."[58] While he actively participated in Banaras' Dharma Sabha and at one point formed a trans-sectarian movement called the Tadiya Samaj (1873), which positioned itself with principles of *sanātana-dharma,* Harishchandra remained loyal to the Pushtimarg and found direct inspiration from the *vārtā*s in his own writing. Take, for example, Harishchandra's *Uttarārdha Bhaktamāl* ("The Addendum to the Garland of Devotees"), which was published in the *Hariścandra Candrikā* in 1876. This Hindi composition draws both on the trans-sectarian *Bhaktamāl* and the *84VV*, and asserts that the *puṣṭimārgīy vārtā*s are chief among all Vaishnava texts.[59] Further, in his 1877 drama *Candrāvalī*, Harishchandra recounts the divine love between Krishna and one of the Braj *gopī*s, Chandravali. While the play's central motif is

[57] Harishchandra was a member of the city's commercial aristocracy, the Naupatti Mahajans, who were bankers that rose to prominence in the period before the final collapse of the Awadh *navābī* ("kingdom" or "state") and the occupation of the province by the East India Company (Vasudha Dalmia, " 'The Only Real Religion of the Hindus': Vaiṣṇava Self-representation in the Late Nineteenth Century," in *Representing Hinduism: The Construction of Religious Traditions and National Identity*, edited by Vasudha Dalmia and Heinrich von Stietencron (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1995), 178).

[58] Dalmia, *The Nationalization of Hindu Traditions*, 366.

[59] Hare, "Garland of Devotees," 205.

viraha ("love in separation"), a common theme of Vaishnava *bhakti*, the drama "also furnishes an excellent example of a writer recasting traditional [sectarian-specific] material to meet his own artistic needs."[60] Indeed, the character of Chandravali in Harishchandra's drama mimics the actions of the same figure in Hariray's *Bhāvprakāś* commentaries on the *84VV* and *252VV*, where Chandravali is the *alaukik* form of Vitthalnath. Harishchandra was thus "shaping a new literary tradition out of time-proven material—transforming the past into the present."[61]

According to Ulrike Stark, Harishchandra's open engagement with such literature helped to make a "strong ideological link" between Vaishnava *bhakti* and what became identified as the core texts of the Hindi literary canon. Crucial to the establishment and maintenance of this emerging vernacular canon was the newly commercialized printing press. In her monograph, *An Empire of Books*, Stark outlines the ways in which the commercialization of printed books in India during the nineteenth century, specifically with respect to the pioneering Naval Kishore Press of Lucknow (est. 1858), led to a new level of mass production, transmission, and canonization of books in Hindi and Urdu.[62] Many of these Hindi texts, notes Stark, were Vaishnava specific. Stark speculates that the Naval Kishore Press's emphasis on the textual traditions of Vaishnava *bhakti* was

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[60] W. Garlington, "Candrāvalī and the *Caurāsī Vaiṣṇavan kī Vārtā,*" in *Bhakti Studies*, edited by Greg M. Bailey and Ian Kesarcodi-Watson (New Delhi: Sterling, 1992), 252.

[61] Ibid., 261.

[62] Stark writes: "Commercialization describes the transformation of the printed text from artifact and cultural asset into a cheap and easily available consumer commodity. As such, it is intimately linked to wider economic, social, and cultural shifts induced by colonialism—notably, the dawning of the age of industrial capitalism, the spread of colonial literacy and formal education, and the rise and economic empowerment of an Indian educated middle class" (Stark, *An Empire of Books*, 4).

connected to Harishchandra's cultural authorization of these texts, but also to "Naval Kishore's own religious grounding in Vaishnavism […]." As Stark writes:

> While it would be going too far to make inferences on the publisher's sectarian affiliation, it is interesting to note that, with titles such as *Sūrsāgar* and *Brajvilās*, his early selection of devotional works shows a certain predilection for poets associated with the Vallabha *sampradāya*.[63]

By the 1880s, the press's small collection of Vaishnava titles quickly expanded to include many of the key vernacular *puṣṭimārgīy* works. During 1883-4, in association with the Mumbai ul-Ulum Press in Mathura, Naval Kishore printed the following:

> 1) The *Caurāsī Bārttā* ("Eighty-four Chronicles"), a version of the *84VV* based on the manuscript tradition that excludes Hariray's *Bhāvprakāś*;
>
> 2) The *Śrī Gokulnāthjī ke Vacanāmṛt* ("Shri Gokulnath's Nectarous Speech"), a text ascribed to Gokulnath which is believed to have been the basis for the *84VV* and other texts;
>
> 3) The *Vallabhākhyān* ("The Narrative of Vallabhacharya"), a seventeenth-century Gujarati praise poem ascribed to Gopaldas, a disciple of Vallabhacharya featured in the *84VV*; and
>
> 4) The *Śrī Govardhannāth kī Prākaṭya Vārtā* ("The Chronicle of the Manifestation of Govardhannathji," that is, Shrinathji).[64]

Although several *puṣṭimārgīy* hagiographies had previously been published in the late 1860s at the Vyagrahad Press (an enterprise owned by Thakur Giriprasad Varma at Beswan in Aligarh), Naval Kishore's publications of the *vārtā*s allowed the texts to reach a wider readership than they ever had before. The Naval Kishore Press also promoted the writing of a contemporary *puṣṭimārgīy* poet named Govardhandas Dhusar. Dhusar's

[63] Stark, *An Empire of Books*, 394.

[64] The Mumbai ul-Ulum Press in Mathura was run by Naval Kishore's caste-fellow, Kanhaiyalal Bhargava (Stark, *An Empire of Books*, 395-451).

works included the *Dohāvalī: Do Sau Bāvan kī Nāmāvalī* (1884), the *Brajvilās Sārāvalī* (1884), and the *Mohanmālā: Saurāsī kī Nāmāvalī*—all of which appear to be minor re-workings of the *84VV* and *252VV*.[65] These developments, along with Harishchandra's efforts to publicize Vaishnava literature, point to the larger, and longer, process of claiming distinct Vaishnava identities through Hindi literature that would continue for several decades.[66] William Pinch speaks to this process when he writes that the popularization of print within Hindu sectarian groups led to an "increasing doctrinal self-consciousness" in bringing to light and juxtaposing the multiple, and sometimes inconsistent, exegeses of religious texts (specifically of hagiographies).[67]

III b. Structural changes from manuscript to print

While in terms of form and content the earliest printed editions of the Braj Bhasha hagiographies followed rather seamlessly from the manuscript tradition(s), within several decades the *vārtā*s as published books had several distinct features.[68] Many late

[65] Ibid., 394.

[66] In the following decades, the *vārtā*s' place in the Hindi literary canon would continue to be established by publications such as: Sir George Abraham Grierson, *The Modern Vernacular History of Hindustan* (Calcutta: The Asiatic Society, 1889); Rāmcandra Śuklā, *Hindī Sāhitya kā Itihās* (Varanasi: Nāgari Pracāriṇī Sabha, 1957). Shukla's book was first published in 1929.

[67] William R. Pinch, *Peasants and Monks in British India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 54. See also: Stark, *An Empire of Books*, 22-23.

[68] For details on the major recensions and the details of the manuscript tradition refer to my brief discussion in Chapter One and to: Barz, "The *Caurāsī Vaiṣṇavan kī Vārtā* and the Hagiography of the Puṣṭimārg"; Ṭaṇḍan, *Vārtā Sāhitya: Ek Vṛhat Adhyayan*. For a study on the differences between the two recensions, see Rousseva-Sokolova, "Sainthood Revisited," 83-97. For a comparative review of these changes with other Indian texts and in the European context, see: Hare, "Garland of Devotees," 162; Lucien Febvre and Henri-Jean Martin, *The Coming of the Book: The Impact of Printing 1450-1800*, edited by Geoffrey Nowell-Smith and David Wootton and translated by David Gerard (London: N.L.B, 1976). In my brief discussion here I have, like

nineteenth- and early twentieth-century editions of *vārtā* texts differed from their manuscript counterparts mainly in including ornate title pages, publication information, advertisements for other books from the same publisher, and tables of contents. Other versions of the texts however, also began to include more elaborate forms of paratext, including lengthy introductions by the editors, glossaries, topical essays, study-guides, and various types of commentary.[69] Stark speaks to this phenomenon when she writes:

> Print culture had brought with it the transition gradual [*sic*] from practices of collective oral exposition to silent individual reading, entailing the need for a new type of textual explanation. This was particularly evident in the case of religious texts, which traditionally relied on oral exposition in the form of public readings (*kathā*). Whereas such oral practices centered on the Brahmin priest or learned pandit as the sole exegete of the text, in a private reading situation this interpretive function had to be assumed by the text itself. What was needed were commentaries that would facilitate contemporary readers' understanding of the classics with regard to both their archaic and dialectical language and their subject matter.[70]

While the print revolution certainly made the *vārtā*s available to the independent reader in new ways, group reading and oral discussion around the hagiographies was

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others, focused only on the conventions that are added to the printed versions of text. I am grateful to Rupert Snell for pointing out that there is also a process of loss, most specifically in losing the affirmations of intimate connection that emerge from scribal comments, which are also a distinct form of paratext. The sense of an encounter with an individual scribe and an "original" artifact like a manuscript can be a different experience from the encounter with a manufactured product such as a printed book. The distinct quality of manuscripts is still recognized in the contemporary sectarian community. While in many cases manuscripts are not particularly well cared for, the Braj Bhasha *kīrtan*s that are sung in Shrinathji's Nathdwara *havelī* are only permitted to be sung from memory or from hand-written manuscripts. Printed books are not permitted for ritual use in the temple.

[69] The narratives also garnered attention in the Hindi literary world as early examples of Hindi prose. Ṭaṇḍan's *Vārtā Sāhitya: Ek Vṛhat Adhyayan* is the most detailed study of the hagiographies, but numerous other scholars of Hindi literature wrote and continue to write on the narratives. One of these more recent texts is: Harimohandās Ṭaṇḍan, *Vraj ke Vaiṣṇav Sampradāy aur Hindī Sāhitya* (Allahabad: Sāhitya Bhavan, 1997).

[70] Stark, *An Empire of Books*, 397.

never fully (or even mostly) replaced by the printed text—a topic we will return to in Chapter Four. What is true about the case of the *vārtā*s, however, is that as printed texts the hagiographies invited readers to participate not only in oral commentary, which is inherent to the tradition, but also in written discourse on the narratives. Other than the seventeenth-century *Bhāvprakāś* commentaries, there are, to my knowledge, no other substantial written commentaries or essays on the *vārtā*s that predate the 1860s.[71] Starting in the late nineteenth century nearly all publications of *vārtā* texts were circulated with contemporary commentaries of one kind or another.

It is noteworthy that *Vārtā Sāhitya* was one of innumerable literary genres that had roots in oral culture (although many such genres were composed in verse, rather than in prose). As Stark notes, the printed book entered and came to flourish in, "a world deeply imbued with oral traditions: it coexisted and interacted with old and strong oral cultures."[72] So too did printed books emerge in a culture with deep respect for manuscript culture. Even to the illiterate, the written (or printed) word could constitute an object of devotion.[73] Because there are few reliable statistics on the rates of literacy in north and west India during the nineteenth century, it is difficult to estimate the number of *puṣṭimārgīy* devotees who continued to engage with the *vārtā*s in primarily oral settings and how many were privately reading the narratives. It is likely that then, as now, sectarian temples and certain lay families kept copies of major *puṣṭimārgīy* texts—as

[71] Stark, *An Empire of Books*, 399-401.

[72] Stark, *An Empire of Books,* 13.

[73] Ibid.

manuscripts or as books—from which devotees could read aloud in sectarian gatherings.

III c. From Braj Bhasha to Gujarati

During the same time that the *vārtā*s became widely available in print, the texts also began to be regularly translated from Braj Bhasha into Gujarati. Even when the published texts were left in Braj Bhasha (and deviated little from the manuscripts texts on which they were based), publication information, introductions, and commentaries were almost exclusively written in Gujarati or in more modern forms of Hindi. While it is not a major issue of this study, it is worth noting that at this point Hindi's development as a standardized modern vernacular was still very much in flux.[74] While the standardization of Gujarati had also begun in the nineteenth century with the publication of dictionaries and school textbooks, the process remained similarly, if not more, fragmented until the 1920s.[75] Gujarati of the nineteenth century was in fact much closer to the Braj Bhasha of the *vārtā*s than was Khari Boli ("current speech") Hindi.

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[74] The late nineteenth century is often referred to as the "Harishchandra era" (1850-1885), followed by the "Dvivedi era" (circa 1880-1920), in which the standardization of modern Hindi prose was said to have begun. The so-called *chāyāvād* era (circa 1920) is generally considered the first "'authentically' modern literary period, by which time Hindi exhibited a standardized verbal structure and formal register, and its authors manipulated language against this linguistic backdrop" (Valerie Ritter, "The Language of Hariaudh's *Priyapravās*: Notes Toward an Archaeology of Modern Standard Hindi," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 124, no. 3 (2004): 418).

[75] Some scholars argue that it was not until Gandhi took the initiative in the 1920s that Gujarati became standardized. Gandhi mediated his efforts to standardize the language through the Gujarat Vidyapith, which published many Gujarati dictionaries and grammars that are still in use today. As Gandhi wrote in the Introduction to the first Vidyapith dictionary (published in 1929): "After the publication of this dictionary no one has the right to do as his fancy dictates in the matter of spelling" (V. Sebastian, "Gandhi and the Standardisation of Gujarati," *Economic and Political Weekly* 44, no. 31 (2009): 94). For an account of linguistic pluralism in Bombay during the same time, see: Kathryn Hansen, "Languages on Stage: Linguistic Pluralism and Community Formation in the Nineteenth-Century Parsi Theater," *Modern Asian Studies* 37, no. 2 (2003): 381-405.

Based on my review of early *vārtā* publications, it appears that the first printed Gujarati version of any *vārtā* text was the *Corāśī Vaiṣṇavnī Vārttā*, a translation of the *84VV* without Hariray's *Bhāvprakāś*, which was published by the Rajnagar Type Foundry Printing Press of Ahmedabad in 1899.[76] Like other late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century publications of the *84VV*, this particular version of the text includes a decorated title page, a brief note by the editor, a table of contents, and a list of other texts by the same publisher. The Gujarati translation remains extremely close to the Braj Bhasha of the manuscripts on which it was based.[77]

By the twentieth century there were more versions of the canonical *vārtā* texts published in Gujarati than in Braj Bhasha, and many of them included relevant commentary that I will examine further in this chapter. While according to some translators, translating the *vārtā*s into Gujarati made the texts more accessible to readers in their mother tongue, such changes from Braj Bhasha to nineteenth-century Gujarati primarily reflect a translation between periods and social and geographical context rather than a translation between two languages, per se.

III d. Paratext and commentaries in the printed *vārtā*s

Commentary and paratext, far more than translation from Braj Bhasha to Gujarati, alter the ways in which readers have received and culturally authorized the *vārtā*s. In his

[76] Purṇacandra Śarmā, ed., *Corāśī Vaiṣṇavnī Vārtā* (Ahmedabad: Hargovinddās Harjīvandās Pustakvāḷā; Rājnagar Ṭāip Fāūnḍrī Prinṭīṅg Pres, 1899).

[77] Translators not only refer to Braj Bhasha texts as a basis for their translation, but also stay extremely close to the original language. Sometimes a word that is believed to be esoteric or dated will be glossed with a more contemporary Gujarati word. For example, *kāch*, which refers to a garment tied in a particular fashion, might be glossed simply as *sāṛī*. However even such relatively minor glosses are kept to a minimum.

book *Thresholds of Interpretation*, French Structuralist Gérard Genette (1930-) writes on the "anatomy of discursive practices" and narrative strategies, paying special attention to what he calls literary "thresholds." Literary thresholds are the "literary and printerly" conventions that "mediate between the world of publishing and the world of the text, and which determine how texts are formed into books, circulated, and received by the reader."[78] These various forms of "paratext," writes Genette, "ensure the text's presence in the world, its 'reception' and consumption in the form (nowadays, at least) of a book." The paratext is what "enables a text to become a book and to be offered as such to its readers and, more generally, to the public."[79] Of course the record of paratext is also itself a record of reception—of how readers, editors, and translators have interpreted and invited others to make sense of texts.

Commentaries function similarly to paratexts, but in more overt ways. There are various types of modern commentaries on the *vārtā*s, many of which are inspired by Hariray's *Bhāvprakāś* in the *84VV* and *252VV*. Some of these modern commentaries share the more formal features of what is normally recognized as commentary, including a partial or full reproduction of a *vārtā* text along with an embedded or separate set of written comments that explain, describe, add to, gloss, alter, question, or in some other way critically engage with the narratives.[80] In Hindi or Gujarati these formal

[78] Gérard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, translated by Jane E. Lewin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 1.

[79] Ibid., 1.

[80] For a useful typology of commentary in religious texts, see: Griffiths, *Religious Reading*, 109-148.

commentaries are normally referred to as *ṭīkā* ("comments"), *bhāṣya* ("commentary"), or *sār* ("abstract" or "essence").[81] Other texts that I have considered in terms of "commentary," however, come in the form of introductory essays or prefaces (*paricay*, *prastāvnā*, or *be bol*), which are included in published *vārtā* texts. Still other sources that I have examined are freestanding essays (*nibandh*) or transcribed sermons (*pravacan*), which assume prior knowledge of the hagiographies and only refer to the *vārtā*s or rely on the narratives' idioms or themes in order to advance particular arguments.

In what follows I consider several examples of written discourse on the *vārtā*s, the contents of which represent broader trends in how the narratives were being published during and after the events of the nineteenth century. All three examples specifically reveal the efforts of editors and commentators to culturally re-authorize the texts by emphasizing their historicity, thereby defending both the religious authenticity of the narratives and of the Vallabh Sampraday.

III e. The *Śrīnāthjī kī Prākatya Vārtā* and the *Vallabhadigvijaya*

As discussed in Chapter One, several extant manuscripts of *vārtā* texts have been dated with a fair degree of certainty to the mid-seventeenth century. Other texts were likely composed during the eighteenth century, and still others have a less straightforward or yet to be determined textual history. While the socio-political milieu of the seventeenth century (e.g., infighting within the Vallabh Kul and political upheaval that marked the decline of the Mughal empire) certainly gave sectarian writers of the time reason to commit their oral texts to writing, some hagiographies of the *sampradāy* may have first

[81] *Ṭīkā* can also refer to a "sub-commentary," that is, a commentary on a commentary (e.g., a *bhāṣyā*). See: McGregor, *The Hindi-English Dictionary*, 404.

been put into writing much later. This is most clearly the case with the *Śrīnāthjī kī Prākaṭya Vārtā*.

As we saw in Chapter One, the *Prākaṭya Vārtā* traces the manifestation of Shrinathji at Mount Govardhan in Braj during the fifteenth century and his subsequent movement to Nathdwara, Rajasthan in the seventeenth century. While there is little doubt that episodes familiar to most versions of this text circulated orally and in manuscript form prior to the nineteenth century, the whole text as it is commonly received today may only have been committed to writing in the 1860s—the very period in which the Vallabh Sampraday was in the national spotlight for its so-called degenerate expressions of Hinduism.[82] Although Tandan's textual history of the *vārtā*s mentions only printed editions of the *Prākaṭya Vārtā*, I was able to locate three manuscripts of the text, which either bear colophons dating transcription to the mid-nineteenth century, or appear in all manners to be of this time period.[83] Other manuscripts, also thought to be from the 1860s,

[82] This issue is discussed at length in Pauwels and Bachrach, "Victims or Victory Mongers?" For a discussion of the Shrinathji deity as an agrarian god in Braj prior to Vallabhite interaction, see: Charlotte Vaudeville "Multiple Approaches to a Living Hindu Myth: The Lord of the Govardhan Hill," in *Hinduism Reconsidered*, edited by Gunther D. Sontheimer and Hermann Kulke (Delhi: Manohar, 1989), 202-207.

[83] The first *Śrīnāthjī kī Prākaṭya Vārtā* manuscript that I examined was originally from a *puṣṭimārgīy havelī* in Bhadrapur (Bhavnagar District, Gujarat), but is now kept in a private collection in Ahmedabad. It contains no colophon or date, but appears from the quality of the paper to be no older than the late nineteenth century. The text has ninety folios, of which the first fourteen and last six are lyrics to devotional songs (*kīrtan*). The second manuscript (seventy-five folios, which are badly damaged and incomplete) is dated 1855 CE (1912 VS *caitra sudi* thirteen) and is kept in a private temple library in Ahmedabad. Its colophon specifies that "Pārekh Māyācand Kuśaldās" wrote it for "Ācārya Abhirām Mahāśaṅkar." The third manuscript, found in the same temple library (one hundred and six folios), contains no colophon or date, but is likely from the nineteenth century based on the quality of the paper and its similarity to other nineteenth-century texts. All three texts are similar to each other (the varying number of folios is due to inclusion of non-*vārtā* material such as *kīrtan*s) and are very similar to nineteenth-century

have been found elsewhere.[84] Moreover, the available printed editions from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries never specify their sources or mention any manuscript traditions—a practice that was regularly followed by editors and translators of other *vārtā* texts.

One such edition of the *Prākaṭya Vārtā* was published in 1968 at the request of Govindlal Maharaj (1928-1994), Nathdwara's then leading member of the Vallabh Kul. This edition is nearly identical in content and form to an earlier publication, which was edited by Mohanlal Vishnulal Pandya and printed at Lakshmi Venkateshwar Steam Press in 1905.[85] While both editions are close to the nineteenth-century manuscripts that I examined, Pandya specifically refers to two of the oldest published editions: a lithograph published in 1884 by the request of Munshi Naval Kishore, which was the main reference

published editions. For further on manuscript and printed editions of the *Prākaṭya Vārtā*, see: Ṭaṇḍan, *Vārtā Sāhitya*, 107.

[84] Other manuscripts that I was not able to consult include those held at the Vrindavan Research Institute and the Rajasthan Oriental Research Institute. For further details, see: Pauwels and Bachrach, "Victims or Victory Mongers?" See also the manuscripts referred to in the bibliography of this dissertation.

[85] Pandya was an English-educated Brahmin from the "Gangetic heartland of British India" (Cynthia Talbot, "Contesting Knowledges in Colonial India: The Question of Prithviraj Raso's Historicity," in *Knowing India: Colonial and Modern Constructions of the Past: Essays in Honor of Thomas R. Trautmann*, edited by Cynthia Talbot (New Delhi: Yoda Press, 2011), 174). Pandya was appointed as one of two temple managers some time after the Mewar state, under Maharana Sajjan Singh, revoked control of the Nathdwara temple from Goswami Girinath in 1876 (Ram Vallabh Somani, *Later Mewar* (Gangapur: Shantidevi Somani, 1985), 281-82). Pandya was closely affiliated with the Maharana and was appointed as secretary of Mewar's Mahendra Sabha ("State Council of Mewar") in August 1880 (Ibid., 284). I owe thanks to Cynthia Talbot for first introducing Pandya's text to me in 2010 and for referring me to further sources on the relationship between Pandya and Dayanand Saraswati, and between Pandya and other *puṣṭimārgīy* figures (including Harishchandra). For further on Pandya's positions on historiography and on the historical status of other texts, see: Talbot, "Contesting Knowledges in Colonial India: The Question of Prithviraj Raso's Historicity."

for an 1868 printing by the Vyaghrapad Press at Beswan.[86] In his *prastāvnā* ("Introduction") to the 1905 edition, Mohanlal Vishnulal Pandya does not cite the 1884-1868 editions as references, but rather asserts that they are full of *aśuddhatā* ("infelicities").[87] He calls his own project a "restoration" which he hopes to present before contemporary *itihās lekhak* and *prācīn padārthan ke śodhak* ("historians" and "archeologists").[88] Pandya also claims that he received assistance in the research for his edition from Shri Gattu Lalji.[89] This mention of Gattu Lalji (1844-1897) is particularly significant because he was one of the more prominent *puṣṭimārgīy* leaders who publicly defended the Vallabh Sampraday and other Vaishnava groups after Ram Singh II's accusations of heterodoxy in Jaipur during the 1860s.[90] While Pandya never says how his version of the *vārtā* actually differs in content from the 1884-1868 versions (and there are no apparent ways in which it does), his introduction to the text makes it clear that part of the reason for publishing the *vārtā* had to do with the desire to defend a clear and accurate presentation of sectarian history.

Whenever its actual date of composition, the *Prākaṭya Vārtā*'s publication and circulation during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries contributed to assertions of the *sampradāy*'s historicity—and therefore authenticity. Pandya is clear that his audience not

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[86] Ṭaṇḍan, *Vārtā Sāhitya*, 107; Stark, *An Empire of Books*, 394-395.

[87] Paṇḍyā, *Śrī Govardhannāthjī ke Prākaṭya kī Vārtā,* 5 (*prastāvnā*).

[88] Ibid., 2-3.

[89] This individual was also known as Shri Govardhan Lalji and was the son of Ghanshyam Bhatt and Lado Betiji (Ibid., 6).

[90] Pauwels and Bachrach, "Victims or Victory Mongers?"

only includes the faithful, but also "historians and archeologists." Other sectarian texts seemed to have functioned in similar ways. The *Vallabhadigvijaya* ("Vallabh's Victory Tour"), a hagiographic Sanskrit text, for instance, claims to have been first composed in *samvat* 1658 (1601 CE) by Yadunath, the sixth son of Vitthalnath. Contemporary scholars (including prominent sectarian leaders), however, are quite firm in their assertions that the text could not have been written until the turn of the twentieth century.[91] It was indeed in 1906 that the Rajnagar Type Foundry Press of Ahmedabad first published the text in print, complete with Gujarati translations. According to John Stratton Hawley, no prior manuscript history of the *Vallabhadigvijaya* has been discovered. Furthermore, much like the case of the *Prākaṭya Vārtā*, there are no extant references to this text prior to 1900.[92]

Just as the *Prākaṭya Vārtā* recounts Shrinathji's emergence and establishment as the Pushtimarg's primary deity, the *Vallabhadigvijaya* recounts the establishment of Vallabhacharya as a powerful philosopher and spiritual leader. Accordingly, the text traces Vallabhacharya's famous "three journeys" to spread his *śuddhādvaita* philosophy throughout India. Like others before it, the text also describes the miraculous birth story of Vallabhacharya as Vallabh Bhatt, his traditional Sanskrit education in Banaras, and *most importantly* his inheritance of spiritual authority from the Vishnuswami

[91] Shyam Manohar Goswami, Personal Communication, July 15th, 2012. Shyam Manohar Goswami is in agreement with Hawley's claims about manuscript evidence.

[92] In fact, the individual to whom the *Vallabhadigvijaya* was first submitted for publication refused to put it into print for this very reason: "he was suspicious of its authenticity." See John Stratton Hawley, "How Vallabhācārya Met Kṛṣṇadevarāya" (Paper presented in Mumbai, January 7th, 2012).

Sampraday—an event that is said to have occurred after the young *ācārya* won a theological debate (*śāstrārtha*) at Krishnadevaraya's Vijayanagar court.[93] According to Hawley's reading of the text, with which I agree, the *Vallabhadigvijaya* wants to persuade its readers that Vallabhacharya's "victory in Vidyānagar" was the "definitive harbinger of subsequent victories in many other places." The text also, I suggest, wishes to persuade its readers that Vallabhacharya's public victory in theological debate was a signal for Bilvamangal, the Vishnuswami Sampraday's supposed lineage holder, to bestow the young *ācārya* with leadership of his own *sampradāy*. According to the narrative, Vishnuswami, himself an incarnation of Krishna, had waited seven hundred years after his own death to appoint the next great leader of his tradition. Vallabhacharya would bring the *sampradāy* out of "hibernation and restore it to life" and re-establish *bhagavanmārga* ("God's path").[94] Questions of historical veracity aside, the narrative is clearly designed to link Vallabhacharya with a pre-existing Vaishnava *sampradāy*.[95] In so doing, the narrative aims to give the *puṣṭimārgīy* community a degree of spiritual and historical authenticity that some defensively feared was lacking in the aftermath of the Maharaja Libel Case.

Earlier texts, which contain some narratives similar to the *Vallabhadigvijaya*, were likely composed as "beacons of hope" during the late seventeenth or early

[93] Other texts that discuss these events include: the *Caurāsī Baiṭhak Caritra* (Braj Bhasha) and the *Sampradāyapradīpa* (Sanskrit). For further, see: Hawley, "The four *sampradāys*," 173.

[94] Hawley, "How Vallabhācārya met Kṛṣṇadevarāya," 8.

[95] Questions of historical veracity in this account are many. Almost nothing, for example, is known of Vishnuswami or Bilvamangal. For further on these questions, see: Hawley, "How Vallabhācārya met Kṛṣṇadevarāya" and Hawley, "The four *sampradāys*."

eighteenth century, when the *puṣṭimārgīy* community felt the threat of political upheaval. Likewise, the *Vallabhadigvijaya* and the *Prākaṭya Vārtā* were very likely committed to writing or first composed during the nineteenth century to re-establish sectarian legitimacy and historicity (albeit in slightly different ways). Indeed these texts, while duly filled with the miraculous, also include a rather detailed record of dates in order to mark major events in the unfolding of their narratives. This feature, which gives the hagiographies an added sort of "historiographic texture," is actually quite unique in the larger canon of *puṣṭimārgīy* hagiography.[96] As I mentioned in Chapter One, hand-written copies and early print versions of the *84VV* and *252VV*, for instance, rarely and inconsistently mention dates of any kind.

These distinctions between what may be modern and premodern iterations of sectarian hagiographies remind us of how the purpose of the texts has been interpreted in different ways, and often in ways that emphasize multiple, overlapping functions. As one contemporary religious leader told me: "Our *vārtā*s are like *purāṇ* and *itihās* combined: they tell us what has happened, that is, history, what will happen, and what continues to happen."[97] In other words, the narratives are "historical" yet transcend "history." In this vein, Hawley recounts a very telling episode from a discussion he had with Narayan Shastri, a scholar in residence at Shrinathji's temple in Nathdwara. Narayan Shastri told Hawley, with "great relish," that indeed Vallabhacharya assumed the mantle of Vishnuswami, bridging a gap of *precisely* seven hundred years. There is "no room in

[96] Christian Lee Novetzke, "The Theographic and the Historiographic in an Indian Sacred Life Story," *Sikh Formations* 3, no. 2 (2007): 169-184.

[97] Sumit Sharma, Personal Communication, March 18th 2012.

Nārāyan Śāstraī's world," Hawley writes, "for any doubts about this 700-year hiatus—or if doubts exist, it is a welcome test of faith to overcome them, just the sort of move out of the ordinary world of commerce and production that brings pilgrims to Nāthdvārā in the first place."[98] The point here is that the miraculous and the "date-able" (the theographic and the historiographic) continue to exist together in readers' reception of the *vārtā*s, even as modern commentators feel the need to highlight certain aspects of the sectarian narrative over others.

III f. Lallubhai Chaganlal Desai's Gujarati *84VV* and *252VV*

While different readers have perceived the so-called objective historicity of *puṣṭimārgīy* hagiography in various ways, after the Maharaja Case it became quite common for commentators to write specifically about the factual nature of the *84VV* and *252VV*. Among the most popular editions of the *84VV* and *252VV* to include such notes are those first published in the early twentieth century in Gujarati by a devotee named Lallubhai Chaganlal Desai, about whom little is known. On the decorated title-page of his 1917 publication, directly below the title, *Śrī Ācāryajī Mahāprabhu (Śrī Vallabhācāryajī) nā 84 Vaiṣṇav nī Vārtā*, appears the following: "Based on countless *prācīn* ("ancient") texts, numerous *ṭippaṇ* ("commentaries"), and both ancient and contemporary *aitihāsik* ("historical") data, Lallubhai Chaganlal Desai has specially edited this text with his [added] philosophical and doctrinal comments." [99]

[98] Hawley, "The four *sampradāys*," 73.

[99] It is worth noting that the title for the 1917 edition, which does not list full publication information but specifies printing in Chaganlal's own neighborhood (Chaganpol, Khatripol in

Desai's versions of the *84VV* and *252VV* contain relatively standard accounts of the texts' protagonists, but omit Hariray's *Bhāvprakāś*.[100] However, almost as if to replace the role of the premodern commentary, Desai includes two types of comments throughout the narratives. The first type, which Desai labels as *sār* ("essence"), are provided so that the narrative's "aim is clearly grasped."[101] Desai's *sār* comments, even with reference to highly debated episodes (such as those scrutinized in the Maharaja Libel Case), are not in fact radically different than the explanatory comments of Hariray's *Bhāvprakāś*. However, the *Tīn Janma kī Bhāvnā* portion of the *Bhāvprakāś*, which describes the three layers of each devotee's *laukik* and *alaukik* existence, are notably absent. Rather than glorifying, explaining, and justifying the actions of the lauded figures by naming them as participants in Krishna's *alaukik nitya līlā*, Desai limits his *sār* comments to theological and practical explanations that expand upon the relationships that devotees cultivate with Krishna in the *laukik* world alone.[102] While Desai's text (and

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Ahmedabad), has a different title than the editions from the 1970s and later. These later editions simply use the title *84 Vaiṣṇavnī Vāto*.

[100] I have primarily referred to these editions: Lallubhāī Chaganlāl Desāī, *84 Vaiṣṇavnī Vāto* (Ahmedabad: Koṭhārī Prakāśan Ghar, 1970); *252 Vaiṣṇavnī Vāto* (Ahmedabad: Śrī Lakṣmī Pustak Bhandar, 1976).

[101] Desāī, *84 Vaiṣṇavnī Vāto*, 5.

[102] A clear example of this can be found in an episode from the *84VV* about a devotee named Parvati (the daughter-in-law of Padmanabhadas, whose *vārtā* is normally the fourth account in the text). In versions of the narrative that do contain Hariray's *Bhāvprakāś* (or a summarized version of it), the episode describes how Parvati suffered from leprosy after she felt pride in her *sevā*—a sentiment that reflected her own *alaukik* situation. As a *sakhī* in *līlā*, Sucarita (Parvati's *alaukik* double) felt pride in her beauty and was thus cast out of *līlā* into the *laukik* world. Remembering her place in *līlā* Parvati knew to write a letter to Vitthalnath, explaining her condition and asking for a solution. Vitthalnath replied, saying that in several days the symptoms would disappear. Indeed the symptoms vanished and Parvati continued to perform *sevā* with pleasure, but not

others that do not contain the *Bhāvprakāś*) continue to recognize the protagonists of the *84VV* and *252VV* as *daivī jīv*s, we never once get a glimpse of the other-worldly *līlā* or a sense of causal connection between the *alaukik* and *laukik* worlds.

The significance of omitting the *Bhāvprakāś*' "three lives" narrative is highlighted not only by Desai's additional *sār* comments, but also by what he calls "facts" (*hakīkat*) in the form of "footnotes" (*fūṭ-noṭ*), which he includes throughout the text. These notes stand out from the *sār* comments because they focus almost exclusively on providing information about devotees' this-worldly social and geographical location, which is not normally included in the *vārtā* narratives themselves (in recensions of the narratives both with and without the *Bhāvprakāś*). Sometimes this information is related to the contemporary early twentieth-century location of Krishna *svarūp*s and the names of their Vallabh Kul caretakers. Other times, however, Desai's footnotes clearly assert the objective historical accuracy of the narratives. In the first *vārtā* of the *84VV* for instance, Desai includes a footnote (occupying half of the page), which contains detailed information about the protagonist Damodardas Harsani's caste (*kṣatriya*), family history, occupation, and place and date of birth (*samvat* 1531).[103]

Desai's versions of the *84VV* and *252VV* are still in circulation, although they have gradually been replaced by more contemporary Gujarati translations. Many edited

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pride. In Desai's version, however, the truncated account, lack of *alaukik* explanations for Parvati's symptoms, and added *sār* make the narrative read as one that is purely didactic. As Desai writes: "by having firm faith in the words of Vitthalnath, even a serious disease can be eliminated […]".

[103] Desāī, *84 Vaiṣṇavnī Vāto*, 3; Desāī, *Śrī Ācāryajī Mahāprabhu (Śrī Vallabhācāryajī) nā 84 Vaiṣṇav nī Vārtā*, 5.

versions of the *84VV* and *252VV*, which do not include extensive notes such as Desai's will still, however, include the kind of "factual" information that Desai stresses in the table of contents or other appendices (as described above). Do these assertions of purely *laukik* matter, so to speak, truly impact the religious reader and show that the modern editor, translator, or commentator wishes to heighten the historiographic texture (historical credibility) of the *vārtā*s? In one sense, yes, they do. Contemporary readers of the *vārtā*s with whom I spoke often encouraged me to notice *vārtā* paratext that highlighted the texts' historicity. However, these kinds of assertions were very often done in a defensive manner and only when I (a non-*puṣṭimārgīy* researcher and student from the United States) first introduced myself. Once it was clear that my personal and academic interests in the texts had little to do with ascertaining a so-called objective history, readers would quickly draw my attention to other matters, as we will see in the following chapters. In a sense, then, paratext and commentaries that focus on the *vārtā*s' historicity are somewhat defensive and, perhaps, written for an audience of "outsiders"—of which there were increasing numbers after the nineteenth-century print revolution. Some commentators speak directly to such audiences in their writing.

III g. Dwarkadas Parikh's *84VV* and *252VV*

Chief among such commentators was Dwarkadas Parikh, a prominent Gujarati devotee associated with the Vallabh Sampraday's Third House (based in Kankroli Rajasthan, but with contemporary leadership in Baroda, Gujarat where Parikh lived most of his life). While numerous versions of the *84VV* and *252VV* continue to be published in Braj Bhasha and in modern Hindi and Gujarati, Dwarkadas Parikh's 1948 Braj Bhasha

edition of the *84VV* and 1953 edition of the *252VV* are highly regarded and extremely popular, even amongst devotees whose mother tongue is Gujarati. Indeed, students and scholars who have worked with the *vārtā*s, both in India and abroad, almost exclusively refer to Parikh's editions—many of which include a large amount of paratext and introductory commentaries, including glossaries of Braj Bhasha terms and statements related to the numerous manuscripts that were consulted in the production of both editions.

Parikh's most explicit statement about the *vārtā*s' historical authenticity is found in a Gujarati essay titled *Vārtā Sāhitya Mīmāṃsā* ("A Reflection on *Vārtā* Literature"), which is included in some of the early editions of his *84VV* and *252VV*. In his introduction to the essay, Parikh claims to address the *aitihāsiktā* ("historicity") and *pramāṇiktā* ("authenticity") of *Vārtā Sāhitya*, particularly the *84VV* and *252VV* as the most significant texts of the canon. The devotional sentiments of these texts, Parikh writes, do not diverge in even the slightest way from the Vallabhacharya's *siddhānt* ("doctrine"). Hence, Parikh claims, the texts are authentic representations of the tradition. While *ādhunik vidvāno* ("contemporary scholars") have claimed that the texts are not historically accurate, Parikh asserts that any seeming incidents of *virodhābhās* ("contradiction") in the texts have been misread—a point that he aims to prove in his essay. His hope, he writes, is that his essay will be proof enough for "all scholars" to accept the veracity of the hagiographies, and therefore the authenticity of the *sampradāy*.

Parikh has several methods of proving the accuracy and authenticity of the *vārtā*s as historically and theologically sound texts. His first argument is based entirely on the

undoubted veracity of Vallabhacharya and Vitthalnath's *vacanāmṛt* ("nectarous speech"), which appears throughout the *84VV* and *252VV*. This speech, which in essence holds the truth of the Pushtimarg, Parikh claims, was passed down directly and accurately from Vallabhacharya to his son Vitthalnath, and also to his first disciple Damodardas Harsani. Vitthalnath's disciples Govardhandas and Krishna Bhatt were the scribes who wrote down the narratives of Vallabhacharya's disciples, which they had heard told again and again by Vitthalnath's son, Gokulnath. Gokulnath was the one to have orally dictated to the *vārtā*s' scribes which figures should be included as the chosen eighty-four and two-hundred and fifty-two Vaishnavas of the *84VV* and *252VV* (of course, he notes, there are many more disciples who are worthy of praise!). And finally, Gokulanath's grandnephew, Hariray, was the *ṭīkākār* ("the commentator") who is credited with authoring the *Bhāvprakāś* commentaries. Parikh even visually maps out the way in which Vallabhacharya's *vacanāmṛt* was passed on through each generation by including a *rekhācitra* ("line diagram" or visual "outline"), which includes key dates (e.g., Vallabhacharya's lifespan).[104]

Parikh then goes on to cite a selection of Vallabhacharya's and Vitthalnath's *vacanāmṛt*, which he reads against Sanskrit treatises written by both preceptors. The written *vacanāmṛt* from the *vārtā*s matches the written (and unquestioned) truths from Sanskrit treatises. Hence, the *vārtā*s must be accurate—historically and theologically.[105] Parikh then moves on to read the *vārtā*s against other kinds of texts. Figures and incidents

[104] Dvārkādās Puruṣottamdās Parīkh, *Vārtā Sāhitya-Mīmāṃsā* (n.p.: Sandeś Prakāśan, 1949), 2.

[105] Parīkh, *Vārtā Sāhitya-Mīmāṃsā*, 14-15.

that appear in the *vārtā*s he claims, are mentioned in a wide variety of "*aitihāsik*" sources including Nabhadas' *Bhaktamāl,* the *Akbarnāmā*, and *Jahāṃgīrnāmā*.[106] Furthermore, Parikh reasons, Mughal emperors themselves appear in the *vārtā*s, as do many members of their royal courts (e.g., Tansen, one of Akbar's court poet-musicians). All of these points, Parikh suggests, show how the *vārtā*s are themselves reliable historical sources.

Parikh also responds to specific "doubts" and "criticisms" that have been made by modern scholars about the *vārtā*s and their authors. For instance, Parikh highlights the work of one Hindi literary critic, Dr. Dhirendra Varma, whom Parikh claims is the author of a text called the *Vicārdhārā*.[107] Parikh claims that Dr. Varma questions whether or not the *252VV* is truly the work of Gokulnath (*kyā 252 Vaiṣṇavoṁ kī Vārtā Gokulnāth kṛt hai?*). One of the reasons for Varma's question, Parikh explains, is that the language in the *252VV* is different than the style of language in the *84VV*.[108] Such a comment is a moot point, says Parikh in defense, because: *vrajbhāṣānī keṭlīy śailīo te samaye pracalit hatī* ("at that time so many styles of Braj Bhasha were prevalent").

In response to doubts raised in another book, *Ādhunik Puṣṭimārgīy Bhāṣā Sāhityanī Śoc Stithi* ("The Deplorable State of Modern *Puṣṭimārgīy* Vernacular

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[106] Parīkh, *Vārtā Sāhitya-Mīmāṃsā*, 10.

[107] I was not able to find any record of a publication by this title authored by Dhirendra Varma. In other texts, however, Varma does address similar matters. See, for example: Dhirendra Varma, *La Langue Braj* (Paris: Adrien-Maisonneuve, 1935), 31-32 and Hawley, *Sūrdās: Poet, Singer, Saint*, 7-8.

[108] Contemporary scholars have corroborated Varma's alleged comments about language in the *252VV*. Saha, for example, claims that "the use of Gujarātī and Persian words in the texts again also points to the [*252VV*] being redacted in the cultural milieu of Western India" (Saha, "Creating a Community of Grace," 231, footnote 22). McGregor simply notes that the text has a "latter type of language [when compared to the *84VV*]" (*A History of Indian Literature*, 209).

Literature"), Parikh specifically defends not only the historicity of the *vārtā*s, but also the moral grounding of specific characters.[109] Amidst numerous examples of "questioned" narratives from the *84VV* and *252VV*, Parikh defends the *vārtā* about Krishnadas and his wife—the same narrative that was highlighted in the Maharaja Libel Case. Parikh directly dismisses any claim by the "*pablik*" that the wife of Krishnadas was a heretic or that she was anything but a "simple woman whose *bhāv* was *pūjya*" ("venerable").[110] If you read the text with the wrong *dṛṣṭi* ("perspective"), then of course you will misinterpret the narrative, Parikh explains. The final point of this particular *vārtā* narrative, according to Parikh, is one of faith—both of keeping one's faith and of spreading the Faith: "Krishnadas' wife spontaneously and guilelessly promised the shop-keeper [to spend the night with him]…but if she had not given her word in this way then there never would have been an opportunity for *śuddh bhāv* to have arisen in the shop-keeper."[111] Just as Hariray suggests in his *Bhāvprakāś* comments on the episode, Parikh also concludes that anyone who reads the *vārtā*s with no intimate knowledge of *puṣṭimārgīy* theology will clearly come to disastrous misinterpretations. Such is the fate of "modern scholars." Thus, Parikh both asserts that his essay will convince such "modern scholars" of the authenticity of the *vārtā*s, but at the same time suggests that in order to avoid misinterpretation the reader will have to essentially become an insider by assuming the correct *dṛṣṭi*. While Parikh does not go as far as to say that only initiated members of the

[109] Parikh does not mention any author of this title and I was not able to find record of a publication by this name elsewhere.

[110] Parīkh, *Vārtā Sāhitya-Mīmāṃsā*, 34-39.

[111] Ibid., 39.

sect can comprehend the narratives, his final comments do have this implication.

Parikh's *Vārtā Sāhitya Mīmāṃsā*, perhaps more than any of the other texts I have discussed here, typifies the kind of response that *vārtā* commentators had to the various accusations by readers of the hagiographies who were not familiar with or sympathetic to the *sampradāy*. Parikh's response, and the form of his response—a written commentary attached to an edited volume of the *84VV*—also reminds us of the changing ways in which *puṣṭimārgīy* readers were able to engage with their religious texts in order to both express devotion to their tradition and to defend it against outside criticisms.

Despite the efforts of sectarian leaders like Govardhanlal to restore the Vallabh Sampraday's respectability by proving that the community was a direct inheritor of Hinduism's Sanskritic tradition grounded in the *Veda*s, the vernacular *vārtā*s never lost their primacy as sectarian scripture. The popularization of these texts by the likes of Harishchandra and through the modern medium of the printed book, gave the hagiographies a place in the newly imagined Vaishnava literary canon. The medium of print also provided lay devotees with a new way to assert contemporary interpretations of the texts and of the sectarian tradition more broadly—interpretations that were often in response to the misguided readings of "outsiders." These responses were recorded, for the first time, through written commentaries and essays, which accompanied Gujarati translations of the *vārtā*s and circulated widely amongst a growing demographic of modern readers.

Conclusion

This chapter has looked at the ways in which the authority of the Vallabh Sampraday, specifically as it was represented through its hagiographical literature, was called into question during the nineteenth century by Indian and British socio-religious "reformers" and political leaders. *Puṣṭimārgīy* religious leaders and lay devotees responded directly to criticisms made against the *sampradāy* during the period in a variety of ways, but also began to respond more generally to questions about sectarian identity, authority, and history that were raised during the Maharaja Libel Case. Was the Vallabh Sampraday a Hindu sect? What was its history and who had the right to tell it? What was similar or different about the Pushtimarg and other merchant communities who were emerging in the nineteenth century as a distinctly urban, affluent, and increasingly well-educated demographic? Through the new medium of print, *puṣṭimārgīy* leaders and lay devotees alike were able to re-assert the historical and theological authenticity of their community and its literature through written commentaries on the *vārtā*s.

In the following chapter I consider the role that the hagiographies continue to play in ongoing *puṣṭimārgīy* debates over ritual practice, patronage, religious authority, and relationships with the state. In looking at these debates and the ways in which they draw on the *vārtā*s, we begin to see a broader conversation, which began during the nineteenth century, about how the Vallabh Sampraday should, as a community, confront the realities of an ever-changing modern world.

Chapter III

Scriptural Debate: Continuities and Contradictions in the Negotiation of Sectarian Identity

Introduction

In September 2013, several *puṣṭimārgīy* acquaintances sent multiple email, text, and Facebook messages, urging me to visit a Facebook page called "Shreenathji v/s Rajasthan Congress Government."[1] The subtext of this social media community page was embedded in the sentence "*ShreeNathji ki sampati par Rajasthan congress ki buri nazar,*" or "The evil eye of Rajasthan Congress [-led government] on Shrinathji's property (or "wealth")."[2] As I began to explore the page, reading over the ever-growing posts and comments in English, Hindi, and Gujarati, the issue in question became clear: local government officials had allegedly nominated three non-*puṣṭimārgīy* individuals to the temple-board at Shrinathji's *havelī* in Nathdwara, Rajasthan.[3] According to Facebook

[1] For the most comprehensive ethnographic study of how Facebook functions as a social networking site, see: Daniel Miller, *Tales From Facebook* (London: Polity, 2011). See also: Ajaya K. Sahoo and Johannes G. de Kruijf, eds., *Indian Transnationalism Online: New Perspectives on Diaspora* (London: Ashgate, 2014), and my own article, "Is Guruji Online?: Internet Advice Forums and Transnational Encounters in a Vaishnav Sampraday," 163-176, from the same volume.

[2] "Shreenathji v/s Rajasthan Congress Government." Accessed March 1st, 2014. https://www.facebook.com/pages/Shreenathji-vs-Rajasthan-Congress-Government/522192447862408. "Sampati," refers to the word *sampatti*, meaning, "property" or "wealth."

[3] According to the Nathdwara Temple Acts of 1959 and 1973, members of the temple-board are to "do all such things as may be incidental and conducive to the efficient management of the secular affairs of the temple" ("The Nathdwara Temple Act, 1973," 9. Accessed October 30th, 2013.

commentators, by placing non-*puṣṭimārgīy* individuals on the temple-board against the terms of the 1959 and 1973 Temple Acts (which state that all board-members at the temple must be practicing *puṣṭimārgīy* Vaishnavas), the government was not only showing open disregard for sectarian leadership at Nathdwara and its legal agreement with the state, but was also revealing their efforts to gain further economic control over Shrinathji's notoriously well-endowed temple, which attracts thousands of pilgrims and tourists on a daily basis.[4] As one commentator wrote: "Vaishnavs, you must be aware that Rajasthan congress govt. has forcefully inducted 3 politicians in the Nathdwara temple board for their greed and vested interest."[5]

In addition to spreading the news about the local government's alleged interference with management at Nathdwara—a complicated issue that I will explain over the course of this chapter—the "Shreenathji v/s Rajasthan Congress Government" Facebook page also quickly became one of many social media spaces in which ongoing questions of contemporary *puṣṭimārgīy* practice and authority could be debated. While

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http://devasthan.rajasthan.gov.in/Files/Upload/6262007105849AM%20NathdwaraTempleRules1973.pdf; "The Nathdwara Temple Act, 1959," 8. Accessed October 30th, 2013. http://www.devasthan.rajasthan.gov.in/Files/Upload/1003201164910PM%20Nathdwara%20Temple%20Act%201959.pdf).

[4] When I speak of tourism I am specifically thinking of how Nathdwara is now listed as a "place to visit" in guidebooks and on Internet sites that appeal to a transnational audience. For example: "Introducing Nathdwara." Accessed February 4th, 2014. http://www.lonelyplanet.com/india/rajasthan/nathdwara. For a discussion of "religious" vs. "secular" tourism, see: Shalini Singh, "Secular Pilgrimages and Sacred Tourism in the Indian Himalayas," *GeoJournal* 64, no. 3 (2005): 205-223; Doron Bar and Kobi Cohen-Hattab, "A New Kind of Pilgrimage: The Modern Tourist Pilgrim of Nineteenth-Century and Early Twentieth-Century Palestine," *Middle Eastern Studies* 39, no. 2 (2003): 131-148; Claudia Bell and J. Lyall, *The Accelerated Sublime—Landscape Tourism and Identity* (London: Praeger, 2001).

[5] Rajeev Baheti, December 10th, 2013 (7:21 p.m.), comment on "Shrinathji Temple." Accessed December 25th, 2013. https://www.facebook.com/shrinathjitemple/posts/379186805517553.

many interlocutors on the Facebook site similarly referred to *puṣṭimārgīy* scripture, particularly to the *vārtā*s, as informative and authoritative texts on such matters, there was little consensus on actual textual interpretation or on how, in the end, sectarian leaders and lay devotees should practically respond to the larger questions that the temple-board dispute had elicited.[6] Who, in fact, is Shrinathji's primary caretaker? Who is supposed to, or permitted to, perform Shrinathji's *sevā* and how? How, according to both legal and sectarian norms, is management at the Nathdwara *havelī*—and at other sectarian temples—intended to function? What do the *vārtā*s tell us about how temple management functioned in the past? While some of these questions are specific to the "Shreenathji v/s Rajasthan Congress Government" controversy, they are also intimately connected to two more general and ongoing matters of debate within the sectarian community that began during the nineteenth century: 1) the question of contemporary patronage—that is, the donation of lay devotees' personal wealth (referred to as *dān*, *bheṭ*, or *vittajā sevā*) to sectarian deities and their Vallabh Kul caretakers; and 2) the proper use of *puṣṭimārgīy* places of worship. Should the *puṣṭimārgīy* temple, often called a *havelī* (lit. a "large house") be a space open to the public for worship, or should it be treated as a private home for the deity and his immediate caretakers? Where, when, and

[6] Unlike Miller's monograph on the phenomenon of Facebook, in which he argues that one of Facebook's primary functions is to provide users with a space in which to express themselves when "offline sociality" is difficult, I suggest that in the *puṣṭimārgīy* context Facebook is one of many interconnected modes by which individuals contribute to community debates (*Tales from Facebook*, 183-184). For users in the diaspora, of course, Facebook does provide an otherwise difficult-to-access space in which one can immediately contribute to conversations and debates based in India. While younger devotees do dominate Facebook-based debates, these devotees do not assert that they use the space because there is no opportunity to contribute to debates offline. As I discuss in the following chapter, people of all ages join *satsaṅg* groups in which devotees and religious leaders discuss and debate matters of social and devotional conduct.

by whom should *sevā* be performed? Accordingly, how should new places of worship be built, if at all, and how should older sites be renovated?

Following on the previous chapter, in which I described how *vārtā* commentaries were used to articulate a historically authentic sectarian identity in response to "reformist" accusations during the nineteenth century, this chapter considers the role that the hagiographies continue to play in widespread *puṣṭimārgīy* debates over *sevā*, contemporary patronage, and temple management. My primary sources include written *vārtā* commentaries, conversation threads found on social media sites such as the aforementioned Facebook page, and recorded and transcribed scriptural debates (e.g., *carcā sabhā*s), in which members of the sect formally discuss the relationship between text, doctrine, and practice. I also draw on formal interviews and more casual discussions that I have had with members of the community. Finally, I rely on my own analysis of relevant *vārtā* narratives as I connect contemporary debates to their textual sources. In looking at these debates and the ways in which the *vārtā*s are drawn on, we begin to see a broader narrative concerning competing visions for the future of the Vallabh Sampraday. How should the community collectively confront the realities of an ever-changing modern world? How do changing *puṣṭimārgīy* practices and positions of authority influence devotional affect? What is at stake, and what is potentially lost or gained with such changes?

In her book *Ethics in Everyday Hindu Life*, Leela Prasad describes the connections between institutional and scriptural sources of authority, and everyday forms of propriety and conduct among a Smarta Brahmin community in Sringeri—a small

Hindu pilgrimage town in Karnataka. Throughout the book Prasad argues that ethical practice is a "dynamically constituted 'text'" that weaves together various sources of the normative—"a sacred book, an exemplar, a tradition, a principle, and so on."[7] In other words, it is an "imagined" or "fluid" text that engages "precept and practice and, in a sense," is "always intermediary." In Sringeri, Prasad argues, scripture (in this case, *śāstra*, specifically *dharmaśāstra*) is often referred to as an "imagined text," rather than as an "actual body of doctrinal texts" which dictate practice.

In this and the following chapter, I both draw on and challenge Prasad's innovative reading of narrative ethics in my own consideration of the ways in which the *vārtā*s and related *puṣṭimārgīy* texts are used in contemporary sectarian debates. Ultimately, I agree with Prasad that moral praxis, while grounded in ideals of scriptural normativity, is always fluid and dependent on larger networks of historically located and socially specific relationships. However, I also wish to challenge Prasad's ethnographic approach to her material and the conclusions that she draws from research in Sringeri. While she makes repeated references to *śāstrik* texts, Prasad gives little attention to people's ritualized reading practices in relationship to any physical (or written) version of these texts, and herself never engages in a close reading of the physical texts to which her informants refer. Instead, Prasad's archive is almost exclusively based on themes and textual interpretations as orally narrated by Sringeri residents—very often in casual conversation. While this method helps Prasad to emphasize the plurality of moral discourse and the fluidity of texts and oral narration, it also denies the fact that physical

[7] Prasad, *Ethics in Everyday Hindu Life*, 118-119.

(and not only "imagined") texts are in fact read and debated and that "imagined texts" themselves have relationships to physical texts. By looking closely at the relationships between "imagined texts" (in the case of this dissertation, hagiography as an "imagined text" that is played out through everyday practices) and physical texts (the *vārtā*s as physical texts, which continue to be read), we do not risk losing sight of textual fluidity, but rather stand to gain a richer understanding of scriptural interpretation as a dynamic process.

Part I: Temple Board Controversies and *Havelī* Renovations at Nathdwara

As the discussion on the "Shreenathji v/s Rajasthan Congress Government" Facebook page unfolded, various commentators began to post citations from the *vārtā*s and other sectarian texts—citations that were intended to offer some perspective on the ongoing dispute between the *puṣṭimārgīy* community and the local government. This section of the chapter looks at these various disputes and considers how the *vārtā*s have informed interlocutors on both sides of the debate.

I a. "Shreenathji v/s Rajasthan Congress Government"—what is really at stake?

Several references to the *vārtā*s on the Facebook page were drawn from the *Śrīnāthjī kī Prākaṭya Vārtā*, the text that describes Shrinathji's emergence and subsequent journey from Braj to Nathdwara in the late seventeenth century. Some commentators compared the local government to the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb, who in the *Prākaṭya Vārtā* is said to have followed Shrinathji on his westward journey in hopes that the deity would take up residence at the imperial headquarters (presumably Aurangabad), rather

than in a Rajput kingdom. In reference to these narratives, contemporary commentators noted that Shrinathji was clearly dissatisfied with the government's interference with management at the Nathdwara *havelī*. The deity, they noted, must have caused the current controversy in order to make his *puṣṭimārgīy* caretakers aware of his *śram* ("exertion")—just as he had caused the Mughal emperor to chase after him during the seventeenth century as a pretext for having his caretakers move him to Nathdwara, where he wished to be re-located for various *alaukik* reasons. What did Shrinathji want now? Maybe he wanted to be moved to Gujarat or back to Braj, some reasoned—or perhaps he had new ideas about how to renovate his own *havelī*?

Other comments drew on the *84VV* and *252VV*, focusing specifically on the ways in which these texts warned against the dangers of looking greedily upon *devadravya* (lit. "God's wealth"), or the material belongings of Shrinathji (or of any Krishna *svarūp*). One selection from the *84VV* was posted multiple times in Hindi. The citation may be translated in English as follows:

> Arriving, the Vaishnava said to Shri Acharyaji [Vallabhacharya], "My Lord! Shri Dwarkanathji has arrived with wealth."…then Shri Acharyaji said, "has seeing Thakurji's wealth pleased you?" Then Shri Gopinathji said, "According to your teaching, he whose mind becomes fixated on Shri Thakurji's wealth becomes impure." Shri Acharyaji heard this and replied, "Indeed, this is our *mārg* ("path")." -*84 Vārtājī* [8]

[8] The Hindi from the website reads: "*Śrī Ācāryajī ko vaiṣṇavne ākar kahā: 'Mahārāj! Śrī Dvārkānāthjī vaibhav sahit padhāre haiṁ.' ...tab Śrī Ācāryajī ne kahā: 'kyā Ṭhākurjī kā vaibhav dekhkar tum khuś huve?' tab Śrī Gopīnāthjī ne kahā: "āpkā kahalākar jo Śrī Ṭhākurjī vastu (devdravya) par apnā man bigāḍegā uskā nirmūl nāś hogā'. Yah sunkar Śrī Ācāryajī ne kahā: 'hamārā mārg to aisā hī hai'*" (September 29th, 2013, comment on "Shreenathji v/s Rajasthan Congress Government." Accessed on October 16th, 2013. https://www.facebook.com/pages/Shreenathji-vs-Rajasthan-Congress-Government/522192447862408).

The cited text refers to the *vārtā* of Damodardas Sambhalvare, the third account from the *84VV*. The background to this brief and oft-cited episode is that Damodardas and his wife, both disciples of Vallabhacharya, have just passed away. After the couple's passing, their maid, who is also a *puṣṭimārgīy* devotee, gathers all the family's belongings, including their household *svarūp* Dwarkanathji, and sets off in a boat across the Yamuna River to offer all the possessions and *svarūp* to Vallabhacharya. When Vallabhacharya's elder son, Gopinath, sees Dwarkanathji in the boat with all these possessions he jokes that, "Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth, arrives with Narayan" (*Lakṣmī sahit Nārāyaṇ padhāre*). As cited by the Facebook commentator, Vallabhacharya replies to his son's comment as a way to assert the message that having worldly desires for material wealth (which ultimately belongs to Krishna) is against the Pushtimarg. To further articulate his point, Vallabhacharya has all of the material possessions offered to (submerged in) the Yamuna River because he knows that: "Damodardas' wayward and greedy son will eventually come after the wealth and try to claim it for himself."[9]

In citing this episode, Facebook commentators are suggesting that the local government's alleged move to place non-*puṣṭimārgīy* individuals on the temple-board is akin to looking greedily upon the wealth of Shrinathji (recall the subtext to page's title: "*ShreeNathji ki sampati par Rajasthan congress ki buri nazar*"). In addition to being a sectarian offence, the government's move also goes against the legal terms of the Nathdwara Temple Acts of 1959 and 1973, which state that all temple board members

[9] Parīkh, *Caurāsī Vaiṣṇavan kī Vārtā* (2011), 39.

must be active *puṣṭimārgīy* Vaishnavas who have been recommended by Nathdwara's leading *mahārāj*, known as the *tilkāyat*.[10] Currently, the presiding *tilkāyat* is Rakesh Maharaj. He is also the temple-board's president.

Since the 1959 Temple Act, it has been customary for the local Rajasthan government to choose eleven new board members every three years in accordance with the presiding *tilkāyat*'s recommendations. In addition, there is always to be a twelfth "ex-officio" board member as "District Collector," who is chosen from among local Rajsamand District government employees.[11] According to the 1973 Temple Act, members of the temple-board are to "do all such things as may be incidental and conducive to the efficient management of the secular affairs of the temple."[12] This inevitably includes the allocation of temple funds for renovation and development projects, as well as the payment of all temple employees. According to one *havelī* administrator with whom I spoke in 2012, there are normally several hundred fulltime and permanent temple employees. All matters "connected with the conduct of seva and

[10] *Tilkāyat* is a term that first appears in the *Śrīnāthjī kī Prākaṭya Vārtā* to refer to the eldest male heir in the branch of the Vallabh Kul that cares for Shrinathji. While this account is not clearly described in the *Prākaṭya Vārtā*, several contemporary devotees have told me that the title *tilkāyat* was first bestowed upon Vitthalray (1601-1655) by the Mughal emperor Jahangir (1569-1627).

[11] A full list of the current members can be found at the official Nathdwara *havelī* website: "Member Board Info." Accessed October 21st, 2013. http://www.nathdwaratemple.org/Management/BoardMemberInfo.aspx. The controversy over new members has halted the scheduled shift of active board members. The names of the controversial non-*puṣṭimārgīy* members have not been listed. Nobody with whom I spoke about the issue either seemed to know who these individuals actually were, or if they did know, chose not to share the information with me.

[12] "The Nathdwara Temple Act, 1973," 9; "The Nathdwara Temple Act, 1959," 8.

puja and other ceremonies and of festivals of the temple according to the customs and usages of the Pushti Margiya Vallabhi Sampradaya shall be under the direct control of the Goswami [that is, the *tilkāyat*]."[13]

For the majority of Facebook commentators, then, the inherent problem with the government's recent placement of non-*puṣṭimārgīy* individuals on the temple-board lies in the fact that outsiders have attempted to interfere with sectarian management and, by extension, with the wealth of Shrinathji's well-endowed temple. The fact that Shrinathji's *havelī* is well-endowed and has continued to grow as a major site of pilgrimage, which requires a formal system of temple management, seems inevitable. "Our Shriji (Shrinathji) draws devotees from all over the world," an elderly pilgrim once announced to me as he was waiting in line to enter the *havelī* for evening *darśan*. "Everyone who comes here, rich and poor, wants to offer something. We all want to contribute to Shriji's *vaibhav* ("majesty," or "splendor")."[14]

Indeed Shrinathji's *havelī* is, by any standard, a regal temple complex, with architecture similar to medieval palace-fortresses of the region, and a rich and complex system of *sevā*, which requires several hundred temple employees (*sevak*s), including professional painters and musicians.[15] It is no surprise, then, that a majority of scholars

[13] Ibid.

[14] Personal Communication, March 17th, 2012.

[15] One of the most prominent features of ritual worship in *puṣṭimārgīy* temples (and in private homes) is the system of *aṣṭayām sevā*, which refers to eight specific periods of the day within the round-the-clock *sevā* of Krishna. These eight periods are said to follow a day in the life of Krishna as told in the *BhP*. According to the current *sevā praṇālī* ("system") or *rīti* ("mode") at Shrinathji's *havelī*—and at other sectarian temples and in the homes of many devotees—*aṣṭayām sevā* begins by waking the deity (*maṅgalā āratī*) and ends with putting him back to sleep for the

who have written about the Pushtimarg, and about Nathdwara specifically, have focused on how music and the fine arts have been an integral part of the ritual system in Shrinathji's *havelī*.[16] While the system of temple patronage has changed considerably over the last three hundred years, community donations have always been a primary means of supporting the dynamic ritual life of the temple. Community donations also support what the temple-board sees as the ongoing and necessary growth of Shrinathji's *vaibhav,* namely through increasingly elaborate seasonal festivals and temple renovations.

I b. The "Temple Extension Plan"

Recent statements made by the board on the temple's official website assert that in "Phase One" of the "Temple Extension Plan," which is now underway, various additions to the original complex will be constructed, including: an "Exhibition Hall, Restaurants, Waiting Space for 25,000 persons [presumably a space for people waiting to take *darśan*]" as well as "Public Utility Services [public toilets], Temple Board Offices,"

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night (*śayan*). In between these two periods, the deity is: fed, bathed, and dressed (*śṛṅgār*); set out to be with his beloved cows (*gvāl*); fed a royal lunch and set down to nap (*rājbhog*); awoken from his afternoon nap (*utthāpan*); fed supper and given time to play with his companions (*bhog*); and, just before being put to bed, is sung to (*sandhyā āratī*). At each of these periods, the deity is sung to, very often according to what is now a fixed liturgical canon of songs attributed to the *aṣṭachāp* poets. Seasonal elements also influence a temple's mode of *sevā*, and reflect the need to care for Krishna according to real-world elements. When it is cold, the deity must be dressed with warm clothing, and when hot he must be given cooling drinks. All sectarian temples have a slightly different *praṇālī* ("system"), but many are related to the *ṭippaṇī* (the "observation") published monthly by the Nathdwara *havelī*'s temple-board. For further on temple calendars and seasonal observances, see: Bennett, *The Path of Grace*, 101-141.

[16] See, for example: Ambalal, *Krishna as Shrinathji*; Guy L. Beck, "Haveli Sangit: Music in the Vallabha Tradition," *Journal of Vaishnava Studies* 1, no. 4 (1993): 77-86; Beck, "Vaishnava Music and the Braj Region of Northern India"; Bennett, "In Nanda Baba's House"; Gaston, *Krishna's Musicians*; Ho, "The Liturgical Music of the Puṣṭi Mārg of India"; Lyons, *The Artists of Nathadwara*; Taylor, "Visual Culture in Performative Practice."

and "28 Donor Cottages."[17] When I communicated via email with a devotee named Sanjay, one of the Facebook commentators on the "Shreenathji v/s Rajasthan Congress Government" Facebook page, he told me that in addition to suspecting that Rajasthani politicians wished to use temple funds for personal or state benefit (namely to boost tourism in the region), he also feared that the government would interfere with the temple-board's plans for renovations.[18] What Sanjay did not choose to share with me is that in fact the plan for renovation at Shrinathji's *havelī* has been a matter of considerable contestation for several decades—and not just with respect to state regulations and building permits etc. There are growing numbers of both religious leaders and lay devotees who oppose the renovations.

I c. Opposition to renovations at Shrinathji's *havelī*

Those who disapprove of the temple renovations at Shrinathji's *havelī* have various reasons for their opposition. Some say that the proposed plans will destroy the distinct aesthetics of the seventeenth-century *havelī*—noting specifically that it could become too much like the newly constructed *puṣṭimārgīy* temples of urban Gujarat and Maharashtra, where a majority of today's pilgrims hail from. Indeed modern *puṣṭimārgīy* temples, particularly those built during the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries, bear very little resemblance to Shrinathji's *havelī*. In addition to architectural differences, new

[17] "Temple Extension Plan." Accessed October 21st, 2013. http://www.nathdwaratemple.org/Development/TempleExtensionPhaseI.aspx. Incidentally, some of the most generous donors are either currently on, or have been on, the temple-board. The current Vice President of the temple-board, for instance, is Kokila Ambani—wife of Dhirajlal Hirachand Ambani, the late business tycoon who founded the wildly successful Reliance Industries.

[18] Personal Communication, October 21st, 2013.

temples are very often located in residential areas of major cities while Nathdwara is located in a rural area, some fifty-two kilometers northeast of Udaipur city. One normally travels from Udaipur to Nathdwara by bus or car, and as the route goes through the sparsely populated Aravalli Hills, the roads are rather winding and precarious. As Pathik, a twenty-five year-old devotee from Ahmedabad told me, "When I go to Nathdwara I feel that I'm transported back to the olden days (*purāne jamāne*)." Pathik continued, explaining that while he supported certain temple renovations (particularly if they would help manage the "long and disorderly queues" of pilgrims), he also would miss the "way things have always been." As it is now, "I feel that everything is *adbhut* ("miraculous") in Nathdwara," said Pathik. "Also," he continued, "we can build as many temples as we like right here [in Ahmedabad], but we should recognize that Shriji's *havelī* is one of a kind. Why make so many changes there [in Nathdwara]?"[19]

For others, the temple renovations, and indeed the tense relationship that temple management has had with the state for many decades, points beyond aesthetics to another serious issue: the comfort and wishes of the Shrinathji deity himself. In her online diary, a Mumbai-based devotee named Abha Shahra Shyama writes about her position on the matter. In one entry she narrates her experience of visiting Nathdwara during the winter of 2012, when she claims to have communicated directly with Shrinathji about how he himself was being affected by temple reconstruction projects. Apart from my bracketed

[19] Personal Communication, November 14th, 2011.

comments, the following text is verbatim from the online diary:[20]

> As there is the construction work going on around the Haveli; a truck was being loaded with the stone debris from the inside of the left side area right inside the Lal Darvaza [one of several main entrances into the *havelī*]. It caused immense noise as the workers did not have any instructions from the temple board to work silently. We were astonished as to how the mandir board [that is, temple-board] allows this much noise all through the night.
>
> We realized why we were called here so early when Shreeji's melodious voice echoed, in which Shreeji told us, *"Dekho puri raat kitni awaz karte hain. Yeh koi sochta nahi ki main ander sou raha hun, itne aawaz meinn mai kaise sau sakte hu. Kissse ko kuch bhao hi nahi hai ki Shreeji andar sau rahe honge. Tum logon ko iseliye jaldi bulaya tha, ye dikhane ke liye. Main yaha kiyon rahu? Main yaha se bhaag jaata hun."* "(Entire night they make so much noise. See there is no bhau [that is, *bhāv*, "devotional feelings"]. They do not even consider that Shreeji is sleeping inside and would be disturbed. I called you'll early to show this, no one cares. Why should I stay here? All are selfish)."

In the same entry Abha goes on to write about how the "entire mandir board, as well as the Tilkayatji is responsible for this lack of proper planning and supervision […]." Justifying her open criticism of temple management and the authority of the *tilkāyat*, Abha explains that Shrinathji himself communicated with her and ordered her (gave her *hukm*) to share these experiences—just as he had communicated with and directed the actions of the great Vaishnavas of the *84VV* and *252VV*.

Lay devotees such as Abha and Pathik are not the only ones to question the renovations at Shrinathji's *havelī*. The most vocal opposition, in fact, comes from within the Vallabh Kul itself. Leading Vallabh Kul opposition to temple renovation and management in Nathdwara is Shyam Manohar Goswami of Mumbai, one of the *sampradāy*'s most well-respected and contentious leaders. As Frederick Smith discussed

[20] Abha Shahra Shyama. "Happenings Around the Mandir." Accessed November 30th, 2013. http://www.shreenathjibhakti.org/shreenathji_mandir.htm.

in a conference paper delivered in 2012, the *gosvāmī*'s opposition lies in his belief that Vallabhacharya's sixteenth-century teachings do not support the *jāher* ("public") worship of Krishna deities and, therefore, that sectarian temples are fundamentally illegitimate institutions that have been built to support what he sees as the lazy and money-powered religious observances and preferences of modern members of the Vallabh Kul and their Gujarati devotees.[21]

As Shyam Manohar Goswami explained to me in a private interview at his Mumbai residence, the very foundation of Vallabhacharya's philosophical system is the devotee's personal, and hence private, performance of *sevā* for a Krishna *svarūp*: *gṛhe sthithvā svadharmataḥ*, he says, and goes on to recite a verse from Vallabhacharya's Sanskrit philosophical treatise the *Bhaktivardhinī* ("The Strengthening of Devotion").[22] Translating into Hindi from the Sanskrit, Shyam Manohar Goswami explains that Vallabhacharya's statement demands that the devotee "remain a householder, follow his own *dharma*, and perform Krishna's *sevā* in the home." As Chapter Four will address in greater detail, performing *sevā* for a Krishna *svarūp* is regular practice for many contemporary devotees, just as it is described as being integral to *puṣṭimārgīy* worship in the *vārtā*s. Shyam Manohar Goswami believes that contemporary devotees have begun to abandon this fundamental practice because they fear that the responsibility of *sevā* will interfere with their modern lifestyles. Instead, he claims, lay devotees increasingly prefer

[21] Frederick Smith, "Pilgrimage and Haveli Seva," (Paper presented at the International Conference for Early Modern Literature in North India, Shimla, India, August 3rd-5th, 2012).

[22] Interview with Shyam Manohar Goswami, July 15th, 2012. For further on the *Bhaktivardhinī*, see: Redington, *The Grace of Lord Krishna*.

to visit sectarian temples where they can participate in *vittajā sevā*—that is, *sevā* in the form of financial donation. *Vittajā sevā* in and of itself is not the problem, Shyam Manohar Goswami explains. Vallabhacharya does instruct the devotee to dedicate all aspects of one's life, including one's material wealth, to Krishna. However, the physical performance of *sevā* for one's own *svarūp* cannot be forsaken. Furthermore, one should give material wealth only to one's own Krishna *svarūp*, not to the *svarūp* of one's *guru* or of any other devotee. Thus, donating to sectarian temples and supporting a system that separates the deity from the direct and personal care of his or her devotional caretaker, is, according to Shyam Manohar Goswami, against the primary teachings of the *sampradāy*.

The reason things have come to this, Shyam Manohar Goswami continues, is that members of the Vallabh Kul have long since forgotten that "it is their duty, just as it is the duty for the disciples they initiate into our *sampradāy*, to perform *sevā* in private homes. If you let another man care for your wife and pay to see her, then who are you, and what is she?"—Shyam Manohar Goswami says, referring to the ways in which most sectarian temples, like Shrinathji's *havelī*, are run by community donations and hired temple *sevak*s. "If you ask me," Shyam Manohar Goswami concludes, "Shriji has long since left Nathdwara and returned to Braj. An idol may remain, but Shrinathji himself has gone." Shyam Manohar Goswami's use of the word *mūrti* ("idol") reemphasizes his belief that Shrinathji—the essential *svarūp*, or self-manifested form of Krishna—is no longer present in the Nathdwara *havelī*.

Given his sentiments, it is no surprise that Shyam Manohar Goswami forbids his own disciples from travelling to Nathdwara and from visiting any public *puṣṭimārgīy*

temple: "One cannot [even] speak of a 'sectarian temple'," (*sāmpradāyik mandir nahīṁ kahā jā saktā*).[23] Shyam Manohar Goswami has also spoken out publicly against the Nathdwara temple-board's plans for renovations and has even filed legal complaints against the board. In 2005, when the temple-board appealed to Rajasthan's High Court for full compliance with its most recently proposed *havelī* renovations, Shyam Manohar Goswami filed a public petition, which is recorded in the state's legal record. In the petition Shyam Manohar Goswami argues that the Nathdwara *havelī* was in fact originally constructed to exclude people from seeing its essence, namely the " 'Rasalila' [that] is being played by Lord Shri Natha Ji during night."[24] To bring more "order" to the temple would be to suggest that ordinary *darśan* seekers could actually see this forbidden *līlā* if given more opportunity in public spaces.[25] The proposed construction calls for "bedrooms, toilets, etc. [for devotees].[26] Thus, purity of the particular area will definitely not continue." Furthermore, argued Shyam Manohar Goswami, since the *havelī* was intended to be a "personal house," it should not be subjected to the protocols of other major Hindu places of worship, such as the Minakshi and Kashi Vishwanath temples.

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[23] Śyām Manohar Gosvāmī, *Puṣṭividhānam*: *Pāṭhāvalī* (Mumbai: Sahayog-Prakāśan, 2002), 9. Pilgrimage itself is not out of the question. On Pushtimarg.net, the *puṣṭimārgīy* website that Shyam Manohar Goswami and others manage, a section on pilgrimage suggests making the sacred journey to Krishna's eternal home in the land of Braj ("Pilgrimage." Accessed March 1st, 2014. http://www.pushtimarg.net/pushti/history/pilgrimage/).

[24] N. Mathur. "Dhirendra Manharbhai (Shri) And…vs. State Anr. On 6 May, 2005." Accessed October 13th, 2013. http://indiankanoon.org/doc/977892/?type=print.

[25] Smith, "Pilgrimage and Haveli Seva."

[26] There are presently toilets nearby, but not physically attached to the temple.

These two nationally recognized temples had specifically been cited by members of the temple-board as potential models for renovation and management at Shrinathji's *havelī*.

The voices of Shyam Manohar Goswami and those who share his sentiments represent a small (Frederick Smith notes several thousand), but rather prominent and vocal, minority in the contemporary *puṣṭimārgīy* community. For this group, the citation from the *84VV* about Shrinathji's *vaibhav*, which was repeatedly posted on the "Shreenathji v/s Rajasthan Congress Government" Facebook page, is indeed relevant to the controversy, but not in the way that those who posted the citation intended. For Shyam Manohar Goswami, the *vārtā* citation speaks directly to the original teachings of Vallabhacharya, which, he claims, prohibit any personal or misappropriated use of *devadravya*. The very fact that there is a temple-board that is legally responsible for handling so-called secular matters of Shrinathji's *havelī* is against these teachings.

However, as discussed in Chapter One, Vallabhacharya's philosophical works do not specifically attend to the details of physical *sevā* practices. One of the most frequently cited verses on the matter of *sevā* comes from Vallabhacharya's *Siddhāntamuktāvalī.* In the opening verse he writes: "Worship (is defined as) the mind's being completely intent on him [Krishna]. To accomplish that, (one performs worship) with both body and possessions […]."[27] This, in addition to the verse from the *Bhaktivardhinī* cited by Shyam Manohar Goswami above ("follow your *dharma* and perform Krishna's *sevā* in the home"), is one of the most specific comments that Vallabhacharya seems to have made about how *sevā* is to be performed as a physical practice (and indeed, the

[27] Redington, *The Grace of Lord Krishna*, 26.

theologian specifies in several treatises that it is mental, not physical *sevā*, that is the highest form of worship). Likewise, while Vallabhacharya's successor Vitthalnath is often credited with developing a more clearly defined system (*praṇālī*) of *sevā*, his writing is similarly focused on theological and devotional elements rather than on specific physical or even mental practices.[28] Because of this, Shyam Manohar Goswami maintains, one must turn to the *vārtā*s as the most "accurate record of the way that *sevā* was performed during the time of Shri Mahaprabhuji [Vallabhacharya]."[29] Read alongside and in light of Vallabhacharya's primary teachings, Shyam Manohar Goswami argues, the *vārtā*s provide readers with a way in which to re-establish authentic *puṣṭimārgīy* practice in the contemporary context.

Part II: Debating with Shyam Manohar Goswami

Before outlining the ways in which Shyam Manohar Goswami constructs his arguments regarding temples and *sevā* by drawing on sectarian literature, it will be helpful for the reader to learn more about Shyam Manohar Goswami himself. After this introduction to Shyam Manohar Goswami and his commentaries we will turn to those who oppose his stern call for change in the *sampradāy.*

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[28] In addition to Vallabhacharya's own writing and the *vārtā*s themselves, Shyam Manohar Goswami and his interlocutors also refer to the *Sādhana-dīpikā* (a "commentary" on the *sādhan*, or the "mode" or "practice" [of *sevā*]), which is attributed to Vallabhacharya's first son Gopinath. The *Śikṣāpatra* is also referred to in contemporary *sevā* commentaries and manuals and is considered by many to be, in its own right, a primary textual guide to *sevā*.

[29] Phone conversation, January 3rd, 2012.

II a. Shyam Manohar Goswami: *guru*, scholar, and reformer

Shyam Manohar Goswami, now in his seventies, is a member of the Vallabh Kul who hails from the First House of the *sampradāy*, who claim direct descent from Vitthalnath's first son, Girdhar (1540-1620). While it is not necessary to outline various *puṣṭimārgīy* succession disputes in detail, it should be noted that the First House is now considered to be distinct from the leadership at Nathdwara, even though leaders of both lineages claim to be direct descendants of Girdhar (see Chapter One). Needless to say, Shyam Manohar Goswami does not exercise what he believes to be his hereditary right to participate in Shrinathji's *sevā* at Nathdwara. Since the 1980s, he has also refused to participate in *sevā* at any of the temples affiliated with his immediate family, whose distinct lineage first established itself in the Rajasthani town of Kishangarh during the eighteenth century. During the nineteenth century, Shyam Manohar Goswami's ancestors relocated to Mumbai along with many other lineages within the Vallabh Kul.

There are other ways in which Shyam Manohar Goswami has distinguished himself from his Vallabh Kul counterparts. For instance, while most of Vallabhacharya's living descendants are kept busy travelling to give *pravacan* (sermons), to consecrate the opening of new temples, or to initiate new disciples, Shyam Manohar Goswami prefers to stay close to home. If one wants to meet with him, one must make an appointment to visit him at his modest apartment in the Parle suburbs of Mumbai. Unlike the majority of today's Vallabh Kul, who keep an entourage of assistants (*sevak*s) to help with the scheduling of events and meetings, Shyam Manohar Goswami takes his own phone calls and schedules his own appointments. In addition to meeting with Shyam Manohar

Goswami in his home, one can also catch him teaching classes or lecturing on Vallabhacharya's *śuddhādvaita* philosophy at local Mumbai universities, or in public meeting halls. One might also find him riding a public bus or strolling on the beach unattended—both actions that would likely be unimaginable for the majority of Vallabh Kul today.[30]

What truly distinguishes Shyam Manohar Goswami from his counterparts, however, is his work as a scholar. Even by his many detractors, Shyam Manohar Goswami is deeply respected as the most prolific living theologian of the Vallabh Kul. As Frederick Smith informed me, Shyam Manohar Goswami received a rather traditional training in the study of Sanskrit literature in Banaras, including *vyākaraṇa*, or the Paninian system of grammatical analysis, and *alaṃkāraśāstra*, or poetic theory, before undertaking an extensive study of literature specific to the Vallabh Sampraday.[31] Shyam Manohar Goswami himself has written extensively on nearly every major *puṣṭimārgīy* Sanskrit and vernacular text. His writings include historical essays, poetry, theological treatises, and commentaries on many of Vallabhacharya's and Vitthalnath's works and on

[30] Most members of the Vallabh Kul and their families maintain a certain ritualized distance from their lay devotees and normally travel with an entourage of *sevak*s who are expected to ensure that measures of purity are maintained, particularly around food and water. While many members of the Vallabh Kul would not think to travel by public bus, many travel widely by plane to various overseas destinations to visit devotees living in the diaspora, to participate in the inauguration of new temples, and to initiate new devotees. Shyam Manohar Goswami finds it hypocritical that members of the Vallabh Kul worry about purity and pollution, yet happily board planes to fly to places that are very distant from the Krishna *svarūp*s who are supposed to be cared for on a daily basis. Of course these *svarūp*s are left in the care of temple *sevak*s when members of the Vallabh Kul are absent.

[31] Personal Communication, August 2nd, 2012.

the *vārtā*s—all of which he continues to produce in an "unabated flow."[32] The first time I met with Shyam Manohar Goswami he gave me no less than six of his own books that had been published in the past two years. Many more, he pointed out, could be downloaded for free as PDF files from Pushtimarg.net, the website he co-manages. Whatever the specific focus of any of his writings or lectures, Shyam Manohar Goswami always finds a way to discuss his position on *sevā* and temple spaces through a selection of textual references. Since all of his works are rather lengthy and his arguments many and highly complex, I will here focus on just three of the ways in which Shyam Manohar Goswami draws on and refers to the *vārtā*s and related texts to make key points about *puṣṭimārgīy* thought and practice.

II b. Shyam Manohar Goswami's commentaries on the *vārtā*s

One type of *vārtā* reference that Shyam Manohar Goswami makes repeatedly in his writing is intended to show that while Shrinathji's first temple in Braj was open to lay devotees, the death of Vitthalnath marked a shift in the deity's intended worship: "In the beginning Shrinathji's temple (*devālay*) was public, we cannot deny this fact, but after [the death of Vitthalnath] it became a family matter (*khānagī*)—this too is a historical fact (*aitihāsik tathya*) that we often forget."[33] As Shyam Manohar Goswami points out, the *vārtā*s report that just before Shrinathji moved to Rajasthan in the seventeenth century there was a familial dispute over which of Vallabhacharya's descendants were to be Shrinathji's primary caretakers and therefore which lineage holders were to preside in

[32] Smith, "Pilgrimage and Haveli Seva."

[33] Śyām Manohar Gosvāmī, *Ādhunak Nyāyapraṇālī no Āpasī Ṭakarāv* (Kacch: Śrī Vallabhācārya Ṭrasṭ, 2006), 12.

Nathdwara with the most prestigious deity of the *sampradāy*. As we recall from Chapter One, ultimately Shrinathji himself, with the help of the Mughal emperor, is said to have intervened and to have decreed that the descendants of Vitthalnath's first son were to perform *sevā* during sixty-five days of the year, but that each of the six other lineages were to have the right to perform *sevā* during the remaining three hundred days.[34] When writing about this matter, Shyam Manohar Goswami cites both the *Śrīnāthjī kī Prākaṭya Vārtā* and an imperial *farmān*, which describes the Vallabh Kul's dispute and decided outcome.[35] The reason for these events, Shyam Manohar Goswami claims, had little to do with the perceived threat of the then Mughal emperor Aurangzeb (1618-1707) destroying temples or with the changing political situation, as many have claimed (myself included), and much more to do with Vallabhacharya's primary teachings.[36] Once Vallabhacharya and Vitthalnath had passed away, Shrinathji himself knew that the purity of his *sevā* could be compromised. The deity thus determined that his own care should be kept in the hands of members of the Vallabh Kul who were to serve him privately. The lay devotee could have full access to Shrinathji (that is, to Krishna) through his or her own private *sevā* of a consecrated *svarūp*. This narrative is clearly told in the *vārtā*s, argues Shyam Manohar Goswami, who notably approaches both imperial *farmān*s and his own sectarian

[34] Gosvāmī, *Ādhunak Nyāyapraṇālī no Āpasī Ṭakarāv*, 21; Paṇḍyā, *Śrī Govardhannāthjī ke Prākaṭya kī Vārtā*, 39-40.

[35] See, for example: Gosvāmī, *Ādhunak Nyāyapraṇālī no Āpasī Ṭakarāv*, 21.

[36] Gosvāmī, *Ādhunak Nyāyapraṇālī no Āpasī Ṭakarāv*, 25. For further discussions on the perception of Aurangzeb in Braj and the corresponding political situations, see: Pauwels and Bachrach, "Victims or Victory Mongers?"

hagiographies as equally valid sources of historical narrative.[37] Furthermore, he notes, Shrinathji was the only sectarian deity who ever expressed the desire for any kind of public temple in the first place—each of the other *svarūp*s whose accounts appear in the *vārtā*s are only described as having been cared for in the private homes of members of Vallabh Kul or of lay devotees.

In line with his argument about the sectarian history of *svarūp sevā*, Shyam Manohar Goswami also points out specific episodes in the hagiographies that refer to the intimate and private elements of domestic worship. Most of the moments in which Thakurji communicates directly with his devotees, Shyam Manohar Goswami indicates, take place in a devotee's private home and very often when no other person is present. Additionally, he notes, the fact that most *puṣṭimārgīy svarūp*s are very small implies that these deities could not possibly have been intended for worship in large, public temples. While the Shrinathji *svarūp* is several feet tall, most of the sectarian deities that emerged during the sixteenth century, and those still crafted for both temple and domestic worship today, are normally between three and six inches in height.[38] One *vārtā* episode in particular explicates this point. The episode, from the *vārtā* of Vallabhacharya's disciple Padmanabhadas in *84VV*, is brief and deserves to be quoted from the original text:

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[37] When sectarian literature does not align with extra-sectarian historical sources, however, or when literature does not directly illuminate the teachings of Vallabhacharya, Shyam Manohar Goswami asserts that there is reason to be suspicious. In other words, he is not willing to read hagiography as an accurate historical account with a blind eye to other historical and theological narratives. He told me that he has doubts, for instance, about the hagiographic assertion that Vallabhacharya was born in Champaran, Chhattisgarh, and also cited accounts about *baiṭhak*s that he believes have been written to serve the purposes of competing lineages of the Vallabh Kul (Personal Communication, July 18th, 2012).

[38] For a different perspective on why *puṣṭimārgīy* deities are small in stature, see: Norbert Peabody, "In Whose Turban Does the Lord Reside?," 199.

> After Padmanabhadas and his entire family had been initiated by Vallabhacharya, Padmanabhadas asked his *guru*: "My Lord, now what is to be done?" Vallabhacharya told him to perform Krishna's *sevā*. Padmanabhadas replied, explaining that since he had read all the *purāṇa*s, the *Mahābhārata*, and other such scriptures it would be very difficult for him to have faith in a *svarūp* of Thakurji. "If I could see the greatness of a *svarūp*'s form manifest, then surely my faith would become firm—and is it not faith that is itself the reward?" Then Vallabhacharya said, "come with me to Braj. I will show you the Lord's greatness." And so Padmanabhadas went off to Braj.
>
> Near to the town of Mahavan there was a lovely place by the banks of the Yamuna River (on the side of the town of Karnaval), where Vallabhacharya [and his disciple] took rest. Early the next morning the banks of the Yamuna River began to collapse, and there from ruptured earth emerged a *svarūp* of Krishna as big as a Palm Tree! The *svarūp* came before Vallabhacharya and said, "perform my *sevā*, perform my *śṛṅgār* ["adornment"]!" Then Vallabhacharya said, "My Lord! In this age there is no Vaishnava who would be capable of doing your *sevā-śṛṅgār!* If it is your wish to have your *sevā* done by a devotee, then you must be able to sit in that devotee's lap! Only then can *sevā* be performed." Then the *svarūp* sat in Vallabhacharya's lap. Suddenly the once enormous Krishna *svarūp* shrunk in size so that his head reached up to Vallabhacharya's chin. Then, Vallabhacharya gave the name Shri Mathureshji to the *svarūp*, who was imbued with all the qualities of the sacred Yamuna River, Krishna in his form of Mt. Govardhan, all of Krishna's male and female friends, cows, love bowers, and the entire area of the land of Braj. Vallabhacharya then said to Padmanabhadas: "has your heart-felt wish been fulfilled?" Then, in a state of ecstatic love, Padmanabhadas exclaimed, "My Lord! I have been blessed by you. Anything is possible through your grace. Then Vallabhacharya bestowed the Mathureshji *svarūp* upon Padmanabhadas and told him to perform *sevā*. With this, Padmanabhadas took the Mathureshji *svarūp* into his own home in Kannauj and began to lovingly perform *sevā*.[39]

This delightful episode specifically refers to the reason *svarūp*s are small in stature—they must be able to sit in the lap of their devotees! For the *puṣṭimārgīy* devotee, the *māhātmya* ("greatness") of Lord Krishna is made manifest through the cultivation of intimacy with the devotee and through the ways in which the deity brings his *līlā* into the everyday lives of those who love and serve him. However, Shyam Manohar Goswami

[39] Parīkh, *Caurāsī Vaiṣṇavan kī Vārtā* (2011), 41-42.

reminds his audience, do not confuse this message: physical *sevā* performed without *śuddh bhāv* ("pure devotional sentiments") yields no fruit. *Śuddh bhāv* moreover refers to a complete selfless surrender to Krishna (*prem-lakṣaṇ bhakti*). The ultimate *phal* ("spiritual fruit") of *sevā* is therefore the satisfaction of Krishna—*sevā* can never be performed with any thought of reward, favors, or consolations on the part of the devotee.[40] *Bhakti* and *sevā* are therefore not to be mistaken as one and the same: "devotion may arise anytime or anywhere, with or without the *sādhan* ("ritual practice") or *niyam* ("rules") associated with the performance of *sevā*."[41] *Sevā*, however, will not automatically produce *bhakti*—it is merely a medium through which *bhakti* becomes possible. Likewise, Shyam Manohar Goswami warns, simply reading from the *vārtā*s does not mean that one has understood the narratives in terms of Vallabhacharya's *siddhānt*.[42]

The most commonly misunderstood message of the *vārtā*s, Shyam Manohar Goswami suggests, is that the ritualized performance of *sevā* through one's physical actions will lead unquestionably to spiritual fruits—that is, to intimacy with Thakurji. The second type of *vārtā* reference that I will discuss relates specifically to Shyam Manohar Goswami's explanation of this common misunderstanding.

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[40] See Paul Arney's discussion on this aspect of *sevā* as described in the *Śikṣāpatra*: "The *Bade Shikshapatra*: A Vallabhite Guide to the Worship of Krishna's Divine Images," in *Krishna: A Sourcebook*, edited by Edwin F. Bryant (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 505-536.

[41] Śyām Manohar Gosvāmī, *Vārtānkī Saiddhāntik Saṅgati* (Mumbai: Ramā Arts, 2011), 221

[42] Ibid., 268.

Sevā, writes Shyam Manohar Goswami and his fellow site managers at Pushtimarg.net (in English), is not "mere ritual," but is rather "the method of love" shown to us by the *bhakta*s ("devotees") of Braj. Here the reference to the Braj *bhakta*s refers both to the timeless *sakhī*s and *sakhā*s (or *gopī*s and *gopa*s) depicted in the *BhP* and also to the protagonists of the *84VV* and *252VV* who themselves have *alaukik* counterparts in *nitya līlā* as these very same *sakhī*s and *sakhā*s. "One should not feel disturbed," Shyam Manohar Goswami continues, "in thinking that a single person living in a small flat cannot perform [*sevā*]," or learn the "method of love." There is no "fixed quantum of materials or strict rituals." A devotee in "his own house can maintain *sevā* according to limited time, place, and facilities available […] without disturbing his Deity, his family and his neighbor." Essentially, *sevā* is a timeless performance and is ultimately dependent on one's *śuddh bhāv* for his or her *sevya svarūp* (that is, the *svarūp* that one performs *sevā* for).[43]

Shyam Manohar Goswami's assertion that fruitful *sevā* is essentially dependent on *śuddh bhāv* does not mean that he refrains from offering advice on the three ritual elements generally understood to be essential to the care of Krishna *svarūp*s: *bhog-rāg-śṛṅgār*, or the offering of food, the singing of devotional songs, and the adornment of the deity. According to *puṣṭimārgīy sevā* manuals dating back to the seventeenth century, these three elements of worship were connected to *aṣṭayām sevā*, and therefore to Krishna's *nitya līlā* as described in the *BhP*, to sectarian *utsav*s ("festivals"), and to *ṛtu*

[43] "Seva." Accessed January 3rd, 2014 http://www.pushtimarg.net/pushti/sahitya/seva/.

("season").[44] In contemporary *sevā* manuals these elements of *puṣṭimārgīy* ritual are often codified, and religious leaders and lay devotees alike continue to produce didactic, although often conflicting, accounts of how worship should be performed according to the teachings of different Vallabh Kul lineages.[45] These accounts, like the *vārtā*s themselves, continue to be open to varying interpretations on the question of *sevā* and, as we will see in the following chapter, devotees openly debate the parameters of normative behavior in ritual. Shyam Manohar Goswami's mode of offering advice on *sevā*, however, specifically avoids didactic listings of the appropriate times to perform worship, or the specific methods or materials needed in this performance. Rather, Shyam Manohar Goswami describes his position on the matter of *sevā* through storytelling with many anecdotes and from his own reading of the *vārtā*s. This method of explaining how *sevā* functions, is not only aligned with what the *vārtā* narratives actually describe, but also with the mode in which the hagiographies transmit knowledge to their readers.

Accordingly, in his writing Shyam Manohar Goswami repeatedly points out that Thakurji's *bhog-rāg-śṛṅgār* is performed in a variety of ways in the *vārtā*s. In some narratives, for example, figures from the hagiographies will only offer Thakurji *fakat roṭlī* ("plain bread"), *khīr* ("rice pudding"), or even water alone because "this is all they had in

[44] Aside from the *vārtā*s, early commentaries on *sevā* include Hariray and Gopeshvar's *Śikṣāpatra*, in which we see a clear outline of how the devotee should approach his or her *sevya svarūp*. The text specifically describes the mental state in which the devotee should approach *sevā* (with humility, lack of ego, and love), as well as the need for physical purification (e.g., bathing, changing one's clothing, and refraining from mundane tasks directly before the performance of *sevā*).

[45] Sumit Madhukarjī Śarmā, *Śrī Vallabhīy Puṣṭi Sevā* (Ahmedabad: Puṣṭimārgīy Vaiṣṇav Pariṣad, 2010).

their homes."[46] The significance of recognizing this, Shyam Manohar Goswami suggests, is that it affirms that *sevā* should be performed according to the devotee's personal means, convenience, physical location (*deś*), and era (*kāl*). Any description of *sevā* in the *vārtā*s, he asserts, is a thus a "timeless guideline" that should ultimately lead to divine intimacy with Krishna. The quality of this relationship is likewise informed by the timeless *bhāva*s, or devotional sentiments, familiar to the *BhP*. As discussed in Chapter One, these *bhāva*s commonly include five categories: *dāsya* (the mood of "servitude"); *śānt* (the mood of "serenity"); *sakhya* (the mood of "friendship"); *mādhurya* (the mood of "sweetness" with reference to erotic intimacy); and *vātsalya* (the mood of "parental affection"). Moreover, the process of remembering (*smaraṇ*) and re-enacting Krishna's divine *līlā*s as they are recounted both in the *BhP* and in the *vārtā*s is supposed to heighten one's sense of Thakurji's specific needs throughout the day.[47]

According to Shyam Manohar Goswami, there is also an explicit danger in *not* tailoring one's *sevā* practices to one's current situation.[48] In one of his *vārtā* commentaries, Shyam Manohar Goswami illustrates this point by recounting an episode

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[46] Śyām Manohar Gosvāmī, *Sevā: Ṛtu, Utsav, Manorath* (Mandvi-Kacch: Śrī Vallabhācārya Ṭrasṭ, n.d.), 21. Another popular narrative depicting this sentiment is found in the *vārtā* of Padmanabhadas, where Thakurji states his preference for the simple chick-pea offerings of his impoverished devotee to the more lavish food items offered by a wealthy devotee who is full of pride. Verse eleven from the *Śikṣāpatra* notes this *vārtā* as primary when learning about *sevā*. See: Harirāy and Gopeśvar, *Śrī Harirāy kṛt Baḍe Śikṣāpatra: Śrī Gopeśvar kṛt Vrajbhāṣāṭikāsahit*, edited by Śrī Subodhinī Sabha (Lucknow: Janakprasād Agravāl, 1972).

[47] Gosvāmī, *Sevā: Ṛtu, Utsav, Manorath*, 21. For a thorough and theoretically astute account of the visual aspects of *sevā* and how the experience of *darśan* in *puṣṭimārgīy* temples contributes to the individual devotee's *bhāv*, see: Taylor, "Visual Culture in Performative Practice."

[48] Gosvāmī, *Sevā: Ṛtu, Utsav, Manorath*, 52-53.

in which a king dresses his *svarūp* in heavy gold jewelry in accordance with a sectarian *utsav*, but on an extremely hot summer day. When the king goes to take *darśan* of the deity he sees that the *svarūp* is dressed in a thin white cotton cloth with a lone flower *mālā* around his neck. The king becomes enraged, thinking that some thief has stolen Thakurji's royal dress and jewelry. The king again adorns the *svarūp* with the finest gold jewelry and brightly colored cloth. When he again takes *darśan* and sees that Thakurji is still dressed sparsely with the lone flower *mālā*, the king finally realizes that due to the extreme heat Thakurji himself had removed the heavy adornments and opted for lighter attire. The lesson here, of course, is to be aware of one's actual environment rather than to assume strict guidelines for *śṛṅgār* according to any text or teaching.[49]

Moreover, writes Shyam Manohar Goswami, "*śāstra bhagvānnī ājñā che*," or "*śāstrā* is the command of God."[50] In other words, appropriate performances of *sevā* are ultimately dependent on the desire of each individual's *svarūp*. In order to be attentive to the desires of Thakurji one must indeed participate in his ritual care, but not in such a way that one becomes bound by the performance of ritual itself. As one of Shyam Manohar Goswami's devotees explained it to me, "when we get caught up in the *maryādā* ("rules and regulations") of *sevā*, we lose everything. We follow the *puṣṭimārg*

[49] In a related and oft-cited *vārtā* from the *84VV*, Thakurji kicks over a plate of *bhog* because the devotee who has offered the food has been mentally preoccupied with his own observances of purity and pollution (the devotee was afraid that his dirty clothes would touch Thakurji's plate, thereby polluting the offering). The account is traditionally found in the thirty-first *vārtā* of the *84VV* (the account of Jagganath Joshi).

[50] Gosvāmī, *Sevā: Ṛtu, Utsav, Manorath*, 24.

("the path of nourishment"), not the *maryādāmārg* ("the path of rules and regulations")!"[51]

Shyam Manohar Goswami's account of *sevā* practices, which emphasizes being philosophically informed and emotionally aware of one's personal environment and the corresponding needs of one's *svarūp*, is balanced by his firm insistence on what he believes to be *vikṛt* ("deformed") about *sevā*. As I have already described, Shyam Manohar Goswami's most definitive assertions about what is unnatural and improper about *sevā* are related to lay devotees' financial contributions to temples, or the acceptance of any kind of donation from another individual (fellow devotee or not) for *sevā* in the private home. In his ongoing commentaries on the *84VV* and *252VV*, called *Vārtānkī Saidhāntik Saṅgati*, Shyam Manohar Goswami discusses these issues at great length. In nearly all of his publications and formal debates with fellow Vallabh Kul and lay devotees, however, Shyam Manohar Goswami is ready to cite a long list of *vārtā* episodes in which he claims that the hagiographies' protagonists teach about the dangers of misusing *devadravya* and relying on formulaic practices of *tanu-vittajā sevā* ("physical and material" *sevā*).[52]

[51] Personal Communication, May 11th, 2012. As I will show in the following chapter, devotees often maintain that the true measure of spiritual success is realized through moments when Thakurji expresses his commands directly to his devotees. As in the *vārtā*s, these commands often come in the form of verbal requests for attention and for specific food items. However, Thakurji may also command his devotees to change some aspect of social or occupational behavior (e.g., avoiding certain business practices or improving communication with one's family members). These moments when Thakurji speaks to devotees are often discussed during *satsaṅg*.

[52] For example: Gosvāmī, *Vārtānkī Saiddhāntik Saṅgati*, 60-61; Gosvāmī, *Sevā: Ṛtu, Utsav, Manorath*, 294-323.

II c. The *Puṣṭi Siddhānt Carcā Sabhā*

While many members of the Vallabh Kul are quick to agree with Shyam Manohar Goswami that the lay devotee's focus should be on cultivating an intimate relationship with Krishna through emotionally attentive and philosophically informed rather than formulaic *sevā* practices, a majority of the religious leaders with whom I spoke stated that Shyam Manohar Goswami's positions on temples and *vittajā sevā* are unfounded. Individuals opposing Shyam Manohar Goswami also cite the support of sectarian literature on the issue of temple use and patronage. Over the last several decades, formal scriptural debates between Shyam Manohar Goswami and his opponents have further polarized the controversy. The most prominent of these debates, the *Puṣṭi Siddhānt Carcā Sabhā* ("The *Puṣṭi* Doctrine Colloquium"), took place in Mumbai between Shyam Manohar Goswami and Goswami Hariray over three days in 1992.[53] Goswami Hariray is a member of the Vallabh Kul based in Jamnagar, Gujarat, who had volunteered to challenge his elder counterpart on doctrinal matters after hearing of Shyam Manohar Goswami's positions on patronage and pilgrimage to Shrinathji's *havelī*.

The 1992 *Carcā Sabhā* was widely publicized and attended by nearly all living descendants of Vallabhacharya, as well as by many lay devotees living in and around Mumbai.[54] The debate was structured in such a way that Shyam Manohar Goswami

[53] The *Carcā Sabhā* was held in a mix of Hindi and Gujarati. For the transcribed debate, see: *Saṃyukt Prakāśan* ["Joint Publication"], Śyām Manohar Gosvāmī and Gosvāmī Viṭṭhalnāthjī, *Puṣṭi Siddhānt Carcā Sabhā: Saṅkṣipt Vivaraṇ* (Mumbai: Narottam Bhāṭīyā, 1992).

[54] This means that there were likely between four and seven hundred participants. I was not able to determine the precise number as I received differing statistics. I have also received wildly differing statistics on the number of Vallabhacharya's living descendants—mainly because of

essentially questioned Hariray Goswami on a number of predetermined doctrinal points, including *sevā-prayojan* (the "purpose" of *sevā*) and *sevā-sthal* (the "location" or physical "site" of *sevā*). According to the transcribed publication of the event, the length of each exchange varied, as did the degree to which the two *gosvāmī*s disagreed on *puṣṭi siddhānt.* The most contentious issue was, not surprisingly, over the nature of the *sevā-sthal*. At the end of the debate Hariray Goswami had articulated that according to sectarian scripture, he did believe that a "*puṣṭimārgīy mandir* ["temple"]" could exist, but that it undeniably needed to exist within the context of a *ghar* ("home"). Therefore, the traditional *puṣṭimārgīy havelī*, he argued, as a home to both descendants of Vallabhacharya and to Krishna *svarūp*s, was a perfectly legitimate location for *sevā*. In other words, the status quo need not be challenged.[55]

While Hariray Goswami did not articulate his position on *vittajā sevā* during the debate, other members of the Vallabh Kul who were present at the *Carcā Sabhā* or who sent in their written comments to be published along with the transcribed publication of the event spoke very clearly on the matter. Goswami Vrajraman of Mathura, for instance, stated in a letter that Shyam Manohar Goswami's use of scripture was *anargal* ("incoherent" or "uninhibited"), and in fact showed little understanding of Vallabhacharya's teachings on *sevā*, or of the *vārtā*s' explanation of these teachings

ongoing succession disputes. Other scholars working on the tradition, as well as several members of the Vallabh Kul, have given the number of direct male descendants as four hundred, and of extended family at well over two thousand. Members of the Vallabh Kul often gather together, but normally for family weddings or other major life events, rather than for doctrinal debates.

[55] Gosvāmī and Gosvāmī Viṭṭhalnāthjī, *Puṣṭi Siddhānt Carcā Sabhā: Saṅkṣipt Vivaraṇ*, 5-8.

through narrative examples.[56] In his comments, Goswami Vrajraman referred to several *vārtā* episodes, which show how lay devotees of the sixteenth century donated their wealth to *jāher mandir* ("public temples") (e.g., the *vārtā* of Purnimal Kshatri in the case of Shrinathji's first temple).[57] In some cases, Goswami Vrajraman noted, the *vārtā*s' protagonists are in fact told directly by Vallabhacharya to *only* perform *sevā* through financial donation (e.g., the *vārtā* of Govindadas Bhalla).[58] In the *vārtā* of Vasudevdas Chakda of the *84VV*, he pointed out, we find both a narrative about how to avoid misusing Shrinathji's wealth (e.g., a warning not to trade the deity's belongings for food supplies that would be used to feed devotees), and also a clear example of how lay devotees who had *śuddh bhāv* were praised for using worldly gains in the service of Shrinathji *and* of other *svarūp*s.[59] Just as with any type of *sevā*—whether mental or physical—Goswami Vrajraman suggested, the devotee should have *śuddh bhāv* when offering material wealth to support the performance of *havelī sevā*.[60] "How," Goswami

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[56] Yogeśkumār Gosvāmī, ed., *Puṣṭi Siddhānt Carcā Sabhā: Vistṛt Vivaraṇ* (Mumbai: Saṃvād Sthāpak Maṇḍal, 1992), 14-16.

[57] This is normally the twenty-fourth account in the *84VV*. See: Parīkh, *Caurāsī Vaiṣṇavan kī Vārtā*, 161-165.

[58] This is normally the eleventh account in the *84VV*. See: Parīkh, *Caurāsī Vaiṣṇavan kī Vārtā*, 105-110.

[59] Gosvāmī, *Puṣṭi Siddhānt Carcā Sabhā: Vistṛt Vivaraṇ*, 17.

[60] Gopeshvar's commentary on Hariray's ninth and tenth verses of the *Śikṣāpatra* address this: "The money that is put to use in *seva* should be considered *pushti*, whereas money outlaid on the *karma marg*—on such things as gifts [to brahmins or mendicants], fire sacrifices, or offerings to the ancestors—should be considered *maryada*. However, if money is spent on luxury items, it is stolen, or it goes in a tax or a fine, it should be deemed *asuri*" [and therefore not be used in *sevā*] (Arney, "The Bade Shikshapatra," 522).

Vrajraman writes, "could Shrinathji's *havelī*, or any *havelī* for that matter, have been maintained without the [donated] *sāmagrī* ("materials") of lay Vaishnavas?"[61]

II d. Defending the benefits of collective *sevā* and *vittajā sevā*

While Shyam Manohar Goswami argues that the *vārtā*s reveal a shift in the practice of community contributions to Shrinathji's *sevā* after the death of Vitthalnath, most members of the Vallabh Kul and lay devotees vehemently defend Goswami Vrajraman's positions and oppose any move to halt construction at Nathdwara or to seriously alter current forms of temple administration and ritual practices (at Shrinathji's *havelī* or elsewhere). Moreover, Shyam Manohar Goswami's detractors assert that *puṣṭimārgīy havelī*s have always functioned both as homes for Krishna deities and their Vallabh Kul caretakers, but also as places where devotees come to collectively participate in temple *sevā*, and to meet with their fellow devotees and *guru*s who offer advice on the performance of domestic worship and other religious and social matters.[62] Although all larger temples, both new and old, have hired *sevak*s to perform certain temple rituals, even the smallest of *havelī*s rely on the voluntary services of devotees—not only in the form of financial offerings, but also in the form of physical *sevā* practices. While direct physical access to a temple *svarūp* and his cooked food is commonly restricted to either Vallabh Kul (men and women) or to initiated Brahmin *sevak*s (only men), all devotees

[61] Gosvāmī, *Puṣṭi Siddhānt Carcā Sabhā: Vistṛt Vivaraṇ*, 17. *Sāmagrī* in the context of ritual worship (not only specific to the Vallabh Sampraday) is a rather technical term, referring specifically to the food, clothing, and ornaments offered to a Krishna *svarūp* during *sevā*.

[62] Anonymous (Ahmedabad), Personal Communication, October 29th, 2011. See also: Gosvāmī, *Puṣṭi Siddhānt Carcā Sabhā: Vistṛt Vivaraṇ*, 17. Here Goswami Vrajman compares temples to *prayogśālā*s ("laboratories") in which *puṣṭimārgīy* literature is kept and studied by members of the Vallabh Kul and lay devotees alike.

who have received initiation are typically eligible to participate in the preparation of uncooked food items.[63] This can include measuring rice and lentils, cutting up fruit and vegetables, or milking cows and straining the milk.[64] All of these acts of *sevā* go towards the preparation of a temple *svarūp*'s daily meals, which in turn are consumed as *mahāprasād* (the consecrated food offering) by whoever cares for the deity, including members of the Vallabh Kul, hired *sevak*s and their families, and often lay devotees themselves.

Krishna *svarūp*s in *puṣṭimārgīy* homes and temples are also traditionally offered fresh *pān* ("betel leaf") and fresh flower *mālā*s ("garlands"). The collective preparation of food, *pān*, and *mālā*s, is frequently cited as one of the most fulfilling ways in which devotees participate in group *sevā*. This is particularly true for older devotees of either gender who are either retired from professional careers or have few familial duties at home. As Manjula, an elderly woman in Ahmedabad told me, "I have been coming daily at four o'clock in the afternoon to the Goswami Haveli to string flower garlands for Shri Natvarlalji [one of the Krishna *svarūp*s housed at the temple] for the past thirty-five years. This is my most important *sevā*." Manjula also performs daily *sevā* for a *svarūp* in her home, but asserted that the practice of domestic *sevā* can only be enhanced, not inhibited, by collective *sevā* practices in one's local temple.

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[63] For further on practices of ritual food preparation, see: Bennett, *The Path of Grace*; Toomey "Food from the Mouth of Krishna"; Toomey, "Krishna's Consuming Passions"; Toomey, "Mountain of Food, Mountain of Love."

[64] This is in the case that a temple will have an onsite *gośālā*, or "dairy," which many larger and more traditionally designed temples do have.

Shyam Manohar Goswami's detractors argue that if sectarian leaders attempted to restrict this kind of collective *sevā* in so-called public *havelī*s and were to prohibit the renovation of such spaces according to the changing expectations of a younger generation of devotees, the community would be not only be denying an essential aspect of its unique past and present, but would also be less likely to have a vibrant future.

Part III: Defending Community Donations and Temple Construction

Regardless of how the *vārtā*s have been interpreted on matters of *sevā* and the proper use of temple spaces, interlocutors on both sides of the debate are well aware that lay devotees' financial contributions have always played a primary role in the institutional growth of the community since the seventeenth century. As discussed in Chapter Two, the act of giving to one's religious community—and later to social and educational institutions—was widely recognized amongst many merchant groups of western India as a matter of public devotion and *ābrū* ("prestige"). The extent to which lay devotees were directly involved in the management of *havelī*s, however, evolved significantly during the nineteenth century.

III a. Trust Temples

In the decades following the Maharaja Libel Case, several prominent members of the lay community in the Bombay Presidency (namely those in Bombay and in major Gujarati cities) took it upon themselves to construct new *puṣṭimārgīy* temples that were not necessarily affiliated with any one lineage of the Vallabh Kul. Instead of granting full custody of the temple and resident *svarūp*(s) to religious leaders, these new temples were

run by devotees who acted as trustees and as co-administrators and managers. According to Shital Sharma, this move towards trust-run temples marked a shift in authority by giving lay devotees greater or full control over the flow of community donations and the care of sectarian deities.[65] However now, as in the past, most trust-run temples, are built with the blessings of a member of the Vallabh Kul who consecrates and installs a deity for community worship. Today nearly all sectarian temples—both old and new—are managed by a board comprised of lay devotees and members of the Vallabh Kul who collectively manage community donations and temple *sevā*. Indeed it has become increasingly common for members of the Vallabh Kul attached to the primary *svarūp*s of the *sampradāy*, such as Shrinathji, to live separately from the *havelī*s that house these deities. Because of this, each of the primary Seven Houses of the Vallabh Kul, and many other sub-lineages, are affiliated with and often co-manage a significant number of temples and *baiṭhak* shrines both in their own home cities and in other parts of India and abroad.[66]

Although today both older and newly constructed trust-run temples are rather contested—with major interlocutors like Shyam Manohar Goswami asserting their total illegitimacy—many lay devotees vehemently defend the importance of this form of temple management. Without a temple board and formally established trust, many argue,

[65] One such temple donor was a lawyer named Rancchodas Patvari. Patvari was not only a major advocate of temple reform and renovation, but also served as the chief administrator of the Vaishnav Parishad, as the vice president of the *Śuddhādvaita* Society and as a member of the Shrinathji temple board (Sharma, "Modernizing Selves").

[66] The daughters of the Vallabh Kul, known as *beṭījī*s, have also significantly contributed to this trend. In the past several decades many *beṭījī*s have begun to manage their own temples, which are often attached to their private residences. Save for initiating new devotees into the sect, *beṭījī*s are increasingly regarded as primary religious teachers alongside their male counterparts.

temple funds will be poorly or misused. According to Bhavesh Shukla, a head trustee at a recently built *havelī* in Ahmedabad, community donations should first go to maintaining temple *sevā* (including major seasonal celebrations like *annakūṭ* and *holī*) and to compensating temple staff (*sevak*s).[67] Funds should also be set aside to facilitate visits from members of the Vallabh Kul, who come periodically to give *pravacan*, perform initiations, and perform temple *sevā* on special occasions. After these expenses are covered, Bhavesh explained, community donations should be used for temple renovations and upkeep.

New or newly renovated temples, Bhavesh clarified, provide spaces that are appealing to devotees, particularly to youth. New temples, for instance, are more hygienic than older *havelī*s in their preparation of *prasād*, he told me, which has become a growing matter of concern for many devotees, particularly during major festivals (like *annakūṭ*) when large amounts of food are prepared and offered to the deity. Also, he continued, newer temples have more space for devotees to gather for *darśan*, as well as modern facilities that accommodate large community meetings, *pravacan*s, and youth and women's programs. Because of this, "our newly built temples are similar to Swaminarayan temples," Bhavesh noted, referring to the temples of one of the most rapidly growing forms of transnational Hinduism. "And because of this [similarity]," Bhavesh continued, "*puṣṭimārgīy* Vaishnavas prefer to come to newly renovated temples.

[67] Interview with Bhavesh Shukla, March 6th, 2012. *Holī* and *annakūṭ* are two of the most anticipated and elaborately celebrated festivals in the *sampradāy*. During *annakūṭ*, for instance (which celebrates a popular narrative about an enormous offering of food to Krishna in the form of Govardhan Hill in Braj), massive amounts of food items are prepared and hundreds of devotees who do not normally visit temples on a daily basis show up in celebration. These are rather expensive events that only can be performed with requisite funds from community donation.

See for yourself," he continued, "you will only find the older folks at those older *havelī*s, while here you will find families and men and women of all ages coming together in one place."[68]

Bhavesh's reference to Swaminarayan temples is particularly significant because it reflects a widely voiced concern that the Gujarat-based Swaminarayan community, particularly the branch known as the Bochasanwasi Shri Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha (BAPS), is "more vibrant" than the Vallabh Sampraday because it is better at attracting youth and garnering community support.[69] The reason *puṣṭimārgīy* devotees give for why the BAPS community is more successful in these ways is that BAPS temples, which have continued to grow in number in India and abroad since the early twentieth century, are "extremely inviting" and not only have space for a significant number of devotees to take *darśan*, but are also fully equipped with *sabhā* ("assembly") halls, spaces for large-scale *utsav*s and cultural programs, libraries, guest-houses and, often, museum-like exhibitions.[70] As Shruti Patel argues in her forthcoming dissertation,

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[68] Bhavesh's remark about *puṣṭimārgīy* trust-run temples and Swaminarayan temples is not meant to indicate that he believes that the actual architecture of these two types of temples is the same, but rather that the general size and function of the buildings are similar. Most Swaminarayan temples are rather uniform in design, although they do vary in size. Except for the central shrine in which the Krishna *svarūp* or *svarūp*s are kept, new *puṣṭimārgīy* temples vary widely in architectural styles and size and often do not have any one signifying architectural feature.

[69] The Swaminarayan Sampraday was established in the mid-nineteenth century by the charismatic Vaishnava leader Sahajanand Swami (1781-1830). BAPS was established as a distinct branch of the *sampradāy* in 1907. For an introduction to the Swaminarayan Sampraday, including the BAPS branch, see: Raymond Brady Williams, *An Introduction to Swaminarayan Hinduism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

[70] According to Hannah Kim, BAPS achieved Guinness World Records in 2007 for having the largest number of temples worldwide—some seven hundred and thirteen at the end of 2007—and for having the world's largest "comprehensive Hindu Temple" (Hannah Kim, "A Fine Balance:

the presentation of a religious space that also offers such facilities is key to how the Swaminarayan community has expressed its own modern identity.[71] Other scholars writing on the Swaminarayan Sampraday have suggested that the community's early growth and popularity were primarily due to its conservative social practices, such as the separation of men and women during worship—practices that were seemingly aligned with other so-called Hindu reform movements of the nineteenth century. While it cannot be said that the Swaminarayan community was successful because it offered a reformed version of *puṣṭimārgīy* or other forms of Vaishnavism during the nineteenth century, it is clear that various branches of the community were, and continue to be, successful in part because of a firm commitment to community funded temple construction projects. Hanna H. Kim has also suggested that in addition to lay devotees' commitment to donating large sums of their annual incomes to funding temple construction and community gatherings at said temples, BAPS has also been successful because it has consistently realized:

> […] the need to address the shifting particularities of its membership within a given social and political context, within the dimensions of gender, age, variations in degree of *satsang* commitment, and even language preferences. These particularities further include migration and immigration and the disruptions to identity that these processes engender.[72]

Adaptation and Accommodation in the Swaminarayan Sanstha," in *Gujarati Communities Across the Globe: Memory, Identity and Continuity*, edited by S. Mawani and A. Mukadam (London: Trentham Books, 2012), 147).

[71] Shruti Patel, "Creating Religion for the Modern World: The Rise of the Swaminarayan Community in Gujarat 1800-1900" (Forthcoming PhD diss., University of Washington-Seattle). See also: Kim, "A Fine Balance," 143.

[72] Kim, "A Fine Balance," 154.

While the *puṣṭimārgīy* community has similarly managed to address shifting particularities of its membership, often through ever evolving forms of scriptural dialogue and debate, the ongoing dispute over temple construction, renovation, and patronage is one of the primary reasons that devotees like Bhavesh express anxiety about the future of the Vallabh Sampraday—especially when compared with other prominent Vaishnava sectarian communities in Gujarat, such as BAPS. For devotees like Bhavesh, the best way to ensure that *puṣṭimārgīy* Vaishnavas, particularly youth, continue to participate in the community is by keeping temple sites well-funded and equipped with modern facilities. If movements like the one led by Shyam Manohar Goswami take hold, he fears, youth will lose interest not only in *sevā* but also in their tradition altogether. Shyam Manohar Goswami and his supporters have specifically addressed this concern by supporting and participating in youth-centered activities that are held at *puṣṭimārgīy sansthān*s ("institutes"), such as the Vallabhacharya Vidyapeeth in Halol, Gujarat, and by continuously providing a space on the Internet for youth discussion and debate (e.g., at Pushtimarg.net).[73] The main funding for the Vallabhacharya Vidyapeeth comes through the Vallabhacharya Trust, a trust run like any other, but which *only* supports non-temple related activities, such as educational institutions, sectarian youth programs, and most importantly, the preservation and publication of sectarian literature. Although these institutions have garnered some support beyond the immediate followers of Shyam Manohar Goswami, they have not come close to replacing the more familiar trust-run temples of the *sampradāy*, which continue to grow in number.

[73] "Activities at the Vidyapeeth." Accessed February 2nd, 2014. http://vallabhacharyavidyapeeth.org/activities-at-the-vidyapeeth/.

II b. Who benefits from temple renovations?

Retaining the interest of youth and the needs of modern, middle-class devotees is not the only reason that people like Bhavesh defend temple renovation and construction projects. While devotees like Abha Shahra Shyama and leaders like Shyam Manohar Goswami expressed concern that renovation projects like the one in Nathdwara directly disturb Krishna *svarūp*s, others assert precisely the opposite. According to Dipa Shah, a Baroda resident and major donor to a *havelī* in Kankroli, Rajasthan, temple renovations are just as necessary for the comfort of a *havelī*'s resident deity as they are for his human caretakers. "We feel transported to another time when we visit Kankroli and take Shri Dwarkadhishji's *darśan*," she says, referring to the *svarūp* housed there. "But just as Vallabhacharya's disciple Damodardas only offered Shri Dwarkadhishji the finest items," she continues, referring to a *vārtā* about the deity and his first caretaker, "we too should keep his *havelī* in the best condition. Otherwise he will not be pleased and he will not want us to visit."[74] Accordingly, Dipa hopes to raise funds to renovate the *havelī*'s kitchen, in which Dwarkadhishji's food offerings are prepared, and to build a new guesthouse for visiting devotees, which will be equipped with amenities such as water-heaters, generators, and water-filters. Like Shrinathji's *havelī*, many of the eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century *havelī*s of the *sampradāy* are located in semi-rural Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh—areas that are often radically distinct from the larger and more economically developed cities, such as Mumbai, Baroda, and Ahmedabad, where the majority of *puṣṭimārgīy* devotees live today.

[74] Personal Communication, April 27th, 2012.

In desiring both improved comfort for deity and devotee, Dipa's vision for temple renovation is similar to what Joanne Waghorne has discussed in the case of the recently renovated Mundaka Kanni Amman temple in a middle-class Chennai neighborhood.[75] As Waghorne suggests, renovations at the Chennai temple, which include fans, porches, and parlors, reflect devotees' own middle-class urban surroundings as well as their concern that the goddess receive the best possible care. Furthermore, for devotees like Dipa, the opportunity to contribute to the renovation of the Kankroli *havelī* is, I maintain, very much a sincere performance of devotion. As with other renovation and construction projects, when the Kankroli guesthouse is complete it will list the names of major donors on a wall that will be visible to all who visit. When I visited a *puṣṭimārgīy* temple in Kochi, Kerala in January 2012, Archana, the woman who showed me around, took great pride in pointing out the several hundred signs that listed the *puṣṭimārgīy* donors (from around the world) who had made the temple construction possible. Archana's own name, she pointed out herself, was not listed. As Archana explained, she herself did not have the means to perform this type of *vittajā sevā*, but for those who did have the means, such giving was a "beautiful expression of their *bhāv* for all Vaishnavas and for God (*bhagvān*). We are a small community here in Kerala," Archana continued, and "until our

[75] Joanne Punzo Waghorne, "The Gentrification of the Goddess," *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 5, no. 3 (2001): 227-267. See also: Joanne Punzo Waghorne, *Diaspora of the Gods: Modern Hindu Temples in an Urban Middle-Class World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

temple was built in 2007, we did not have much space for *satsaṅg* and because of this, our *bhāv* really suffered."[76]

Acts of renovating and building *puṣṭimārgīy* temples with the financial support of the lay community are thus defended for a variety of reasons. Some religious leaders, such as Goswami Vrajraman, refer specifically to the *vārtā*s to argue that so-called public temples supported by *vittajā sevā* have historically been central to the preservation and growth of the community. Furthermore, using the same line that Shyam Manohar Goswami would use in opposition to public temples, lay devotees like Dipa maintain that keeping *havelī*s up to date is most importantly a reflection of the needs of Krishna *svarūp*s, who themselves, Dipa says, "should be served all the best according to the changing times and means of his caretakers."[77] While my personal sentiments and aesthetic preferences often tempt me to say otherwise, both Shyam Manohar Goswami and his detractors are equally concerned for the well-being of the *puṣṭimārgīy* community, its deities, and the *sampradāy*'s future, and are likewise equally committed to making major changes in sectarian practice to see these desired futures become realities.[78] On the one hand, for individuals like Bhavesh and Dipa, the *sampradāy*'s

[76] Personal Communication, January 25th, 2012. The Kochi temple was, like many newly built temples, fully equipped with technical systems for regular communication between the local community and fellow devotees and religious leaders elsewhere in India and abroad. For instance, large-screened monitors allow local devotees to join *satsaṅg*s through Skype and to watch live *pravacan* ("sermon") by members of the Vallabh Kul.

[77] Personal Communication, April 27th, 2012.

[78] I am, for instance, openly sad to see a seventeenth-century *havelī* like the one in Nathdwara be so drastically altered by modern renovations. I am also concerned about the state of rare manuscripts and books and their care by the sectarian community—a concern that I have shared openly with lay devotees. Almost none of the community-funded renovation projects focus on the

future lies in the maintenance and construction of temples that accommodate both collective *sevā* of sectarian deities as well as the needs of modern devotees and shifting urban landscapes. On the other hand, for Shyam Manohar Goswami and those who champion his cause, the community's future lies in returning to what is believed to have been Vallabhacharya's primary prescription: total commitment to Krishna through private domestic worship.

What are the implications of these ongoing debates over text and practice for the *puṣṭimārgīy* community? What is the connection between temple renovation and construction projects and distinctly middle-class commitments? As John Stratton Hawley writes in an introduction to a collection of articles in the *International Journal of Hindu Studies*, accounts of on "middle-class religiosity" in South Asia illuminate a variety of "interlocking religious themata," including: "images of divine/domestic comfort that answer to the anxieties of displacement" an effort to "connect urban realities with a remembered hinterland," and the "overarching mood of *bhakti*."[79] What is most significant about studying such accounts of middle-class religiosity, Hawley continues, is that these accounts allow us to consider religion and religious change not merely in terms of "great and little traditions," and other such categorical binaries that seemed to dominate scholarship on South Asian religions during the 1980s and 1990s, but rather in terms of more fluid and dynamic negotiations of tradition and modernity, of continuity

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preservation of texts—another matter that I have brought up numerous times with interlocutors on both sides of these debates.

[79] John Stratton Hawley, "Modern India and the Question of Middle-Class Religion," *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 5, no. 3 (2001): 217-225.

and change. What is most interesting to me, however, and what is very often overlooked in scholarship on middle-class Hindu communities in contemporary India, are the modes in which these negotiations happen. In this case, I am referring to the ways in which devotees read, comment on, and debate premodern scripture in ways that challenge, confirm, or (re)construct religious identities and practices.

Conclusion: Narrative Ethics and Scriptural Interpretation

This chapter has considered the dynamic ways in which contemporary *puṣṭimārgīy* religious leaders and devotees interpret scripture as they engage in debates over ritual practice, the use of temple spaces, and more broadly over the future of sectarian identity. The ways in which the *vārtā*s are interpreted in different ways and to different ends reflect the social process that has come to be called "narrative ethics." Narrative ethics argues that, "ethical deliberation is a narrative endeavor, one that allows the individual agent to explore through reflection, recollection, and retelling, the all too common human predicaments of ambiguity, uncertainty, failure, or possibility."[80] Much of what has driven the narrative ethics approach to literature, argues Leela Prasad in her work on interpretations of *śāstra* in Sringeri, has been the objection to ethicists' inability to factor in the significance of individual experience, of social and historical location, and

[80] Prasad, *Ethics in Everyday Hindu Life*, 19-20. The anxiety that narrative ethics supports a kind of moral relativism is answered by the recognition that narratives are "social products, linguistically mediated and culturally conditioned," and that they thus always articulate a relation to "something larger than itself" (Ibid., 20). For further on narrative ethics, see: Adam Z. Newton, *Narrative Ethics* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995).

of culturally specific formations and expressions of morality.[81] Regardless of how narrative ethics allows us to consider the ethical underpinnings of narrative experience, argues Prasad, this discourse often ignores the implications of oral narrative for ethical inquiry. While this may be true, Prasad's own work fails to recognize the relationship between narrative experience that continues to be grounded in physical texts, such as the *vārtā*s, and the emergent practices of both written and oral commentary that occur in direct relationship to these texts. Considering the interplay between written texts and both written and oral commentaries has revealed the inherent plurality of sectarian discourse, even in scripturally specific settings. These debates also reveal the creative ways in which people use premodern narratives as authoritative with respect to their own contemporary negotiations of sectarian practice. While none of this is surprising, it is profoundly integral to both the *puṣṭimārgīy* context and to practices of religious reading and scriptural interpretation more generally. With reference to Islamic scripture, for instance, Edward Said has called the interplay between "text and circumstantiality" the "constitutive interaction" between injunction and action. As Said rightly asserts, "texts have ways of existing that even in the most rarefied form are always enmeshed in circumstance, time, place, and society—in short, they are in the world, and hence worldly."[82]

[81] In the Euro-American context such ethicists include those who follow rule-oriented approaches to morality and ethics (e.g., Descartes and Kant).

[82] Edward W. Said, *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), 39.

In the following chapter we will continue to explore the practice of reading and commenting on the *puṣṭimārgīy vārtā*s, but in a different context—in the ritualized space of *satsaṅg*. Like commentaries and scriptural debates examined in this chapter, ritualized reading and oral exegesis of the *vārtā*s in *satsaṅg* can touch on major debates within the Vallabh Sampraday that relate to matters such as the proper use of *havelī*s as public or private spaces. However, as I will show, oral commentary during group readings frequently attends to the more intimate and private negotiations of individual devotees' everyday lives and devotional practices—such as what kinds of clothing to wear during *sevā*, how to interact with difficult family members, what kinds of food to prepare for one's household *svarūp* and for one's family, or how to maintain strict dietary restrictions when traveling abroad. What the case studies of both this and the following chapter demand of us theoretically, I argue, is a reconsideration what "reading" is, how it functions, and what it means to read religiously.

Chapter IV

Religious Reading and Everyday Lives

Introduction: the Theology of Pizza

jo pratham caurāsī dosobāvankī pās prabhu māṁgimāmgike ārogte,
eseṁ mokoṁ kab hoygo?[1]

"When will the Lord come begging me for every mouthful of food, as he did with the two hundred and fifty-two devotees of yore?"

The ten women gathered at Ahmedabad's Vallabh Dham temple are nearing the end of a two-hour long session of reading the *vārtā*s. What keeps these women from concluding their weekly meeting is an animated discussion that has arisen in response to a narrative from the *84VV*, which has been read aloud by one of the reading group's participants. The narrative in question describes the relationship between an elderly widowed disciple of Vallabhacharya and the Krishna *svarūp* that she keeps in her home. One day, the *vārtā* recounts, the elderly widow—a very busy woman—decides to prepare food for Thakurji in bulk, hoping that the supply will last a full ten days. This way, the woman reasons, she will be able to attend to her own spinning work, from which she earns her living. However, Thakurji, who loves only freshly cooked items, gobbles down the entire food supply in one sitting, and then chastises his devotee for being lazy. According to Hariray's *Bhāvprakāś*, the moral of the story is that the devotee must

[1] Dvārkādās Parīkh, ed., *Śrī Harirāyjī Mahāprabhupraṇīt 41 Baḍe Śikṣāpatra* (Ahmedabad: Pūjā Prakāśan, 2011), 119 (verse 11.5).

prepare fresh food for his or her household *svarūp* daily.[2]

In response to hearing this *vārtā* episode read aloud, a woman named Megha shares an anecdote with the other members of the Vallabh Dham reading group about how she and her sister-in-law were recently debating which kind of milk pudding to prepare for their family's household *svarūp*. According to Megha's account, she herself had suggested that they prepare a somewhat complicated and time-consuming dish, while her sister-in-law was insistent that they prepare a more simplified version of the pudding. "Well," says Megha, wrapping up he story, "I told her, fine then! If we don't have time to cook something special ourselves, we might as well just order him a pizza!" Some women fall into fits of laughter over the anecdote, while others quiet their fellow devotees so that they can respond to Megha's comment. "But why *not* pizza?" one woman named Kumud asks sincerely. "Isn't he supposed to eat what we eat? Isn't he part of our family?" Megha makes a face of disapproval: "But he'll burn his mouth," she exclaims. "Imagine all the cheese from the hot pizza getting stuck on his lips! Like that widow from the *vārtā* learned, we should never be so lazy as to disregard his comfort."

The debate continues for another twenty minutes until Kumud's young daughter arrives at the temple where she has been dropped off after a dance lesson. It is time for the women at the Vallabh Dham temple to return home, where many will prepare meals for Thakurji and for their families. Pizza, most have concluded, could potentially be on the menu, but only if it is made by hand in a woman's home, and only if it is offered and fed with loving care to Thakurji so that he does not burn his mouth.

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[2] This refers to what is traditionally the forty-third *vārtā* from the *84VV*, about a *kṣatriya* woman from Prayag.

In the above episode, the mention of "ordering Thakurji pizza" is both comical and outrageous for two complementary reasons: not only does pizza represent something culturally remote from the imagined *puṣṭimārgīy* world of the *vārtā*s—supposedly timeless, but actually clothed in the late-medieval context of Braj—but also the concept of ordering, rather than preparing food, seems to directly contradict the performance of *sevā*. Indeed the widow in the *vārtā* is chastised for what we might take to be a seventeenth-century equivalent of ordering take-out: preparing food in bulk to save time. While Megha's comment is meant to rhetorically dismiss the improper suggestion of ordering food for Thakurji, Kumud's challenge ("why *not* pizza?") demands that the women reconsider the constituents of *sevā*. Although the women ultimately conclude that ordering pizza is out of the question (Krishna's food should at least be handmade in a devotee's home), the discussion first retreats to the conventional matter of whether Thakurji would suffer if fed pizza—would he burn his mouth? It is just these sorts of considerations that are at the heart of contemporary devotees' negotiations between prescription and practice—between what the *vārtā*s are perceived to teach and everyday life in the modern world.

As with the written commentaries and debates that we considered in Chapter Three, group discussion of the *vārtā*s can participate in major debates within the *sampradāy* on matters such as hierarchies in sectarian leadership, temple management and renovation, and contemporary patronage. However, as shown throughout this chapter, oral commentary during reading groups frequently attends to the more intimate and private negotiations of individual devotees' everyday lives and devotional

practices—such as what kinds of clothing to wear during *sevā* or, as we saw in the opening example, what kinds of food to prepare for one's household *svarūp*.

Accordingly, the central questions of this chapter are: how do readers of the *vārtā*s imagine and express social and devotional worlds through the performative practices of reading? To what extent do the *vārtā*s' protagonists continue to function as viable models for today's readers? What indeed is considered to be normative for whom and when, and what kind of vocabulary from the *vārtā*s continues to be used to articulate contemporary *puṣṭimārgīy* identities? Moreover, what are devotees' primary aims in reading the *vārtā*s? In addressing these questions, this chapter describes the various contexts in which the *vārtā*s are read in Ahmedabad. After giving a general typology of reading groups in the city, I will focus on key issues that arise in the context of three distinct groups that I visited regularly over the course of one year of research in Ahmedabad. Building on the material presented in previous chapters, these case studies demand that we reconsider the distinct ways in which religious reading functions.

Part I: Reading the *84VV* and *252VV* in Ahmedabad City

puṣṭimārgīy janoṁ ke liye vārtājī kā mahatva [sic]
dainik satsaṅg ke rūp meṁ sarvopari rahā hai.

"For *puṣṭimārgīy* folks, the importance of *vārtājī* [narratives]
has remained paramount in the form of daily *satsaṅg*."[3]

Before analyzing specific *vārtā* reading groups in detail, it will be useful to provide a general introduction to the various types of gatherings and designations that are referred to throughout this chapter. Who leads these reading groups, when, and in which kinds of spaces? What are the demographics of group participants and how might such demographics affect the kinds of discourse that arise during reading sessions?

I a. The context of *satsaṅg*

Satsaṅg is the most common term used to designate the context of *vārtā* readings. Literally, "association of the virtuous," *satsaṅg* is a non-sectarian-specific word (common to Sanskritic languages) that can refer to gatherings of devotees who have come together to sing devotional songs or to read or discuss religious narratives. Because even in the *puṣṭimārgīy* context *satsaṅg* does not necessarily specify a meeting in which the *vārtā*s alone are read, devotees frequently refer to groups that do focus on the hagiographies as *vārtā-satsaṅg*. Another term that is used interchangeably with *satsaṅg* or *vārtā-satsaṅg* is *bhagavadvārtā*, meaning "godly-discourse" or "discussion that pertains to the Lord

[3] Gosvāmī Rukmiṇī Bahūjī, "Śubhāśīrvād," in *Do Sau Bāvan Vaiṣṇavan kī Vārtā (Tīn Janma kī Līlā Bhāvnā Vālī*): *Dvitīya Bhāg*, edited by Dvārkādās Parīkh (Indore: Vaiṣṇav Mitra Maṇḍal, 2009), 3.

(Krishna) and to the Lord's devotees."[4] Because these designations are used interchangeably, I refer to all reading groups led by lay devotees as *satsaṅg* unless participants explicitly label their gatherings differently.

As introduced in Chapter One, the terms *satsaṅg* and *bhagavadvārtā* appear regularly throughout the *84VV* and *252VV* narratives, which repeatedly highlight the ways in which such gatherings are essential to the cultivation of religious learning and devotional affect. Devotees experience intense joy from participating in *satsaṅg*, the *vārtā*s tell us, and both the *guru* and Thakurji himself gain deep satisfaction from the meeting of fellow *bhakta*s.[5] Vallabhacharya's own writing also emphasizes *satsaṅg* in his *Bhaktivardhinī* treatise and elsewhere.[6] In a "compilation of *puṣṭi* truths" to be "emulated and venerated" (*anukāraṇīy-mānanīy*) by *vārtā* readers, one contemporary commentator notes: "from *satsaṅg* even the dried up heart becomes moist [with devotion]."[7] Furthermore, Hariray's *Bhāvprakāś* commentary in the *84VV* specifically tells its audience to read the *vārtā*s in the context of *satsaṅg* and that the fruit of all sectarian teachings are to be found through the discussion of Vallabhacharya's devotees: "[…] it is by means of the Vaishnavas that the Pushtimarg will come to fruition […] discourse on

[4] The term *bhagavadvārtā* can also refer to the *BhP*—both to the text itself and to discussion or exegesis of it.

[5] For example, see the *vārtā* of Santdas Chopra, traditionally the seventy-sixth *vārtā* in the *84VV*.

[6] Redington, *The Grace of Lord Krishna*, 127 (verse 7b-8).

[7] Dvārkādās Parīkh, "Granth meṁ Prāpt Puṣṭi ke Anukāraṇīy aur Mānanīy Tathyoṁ kā Saṃkalan," in *Caurāsī Vaiṣṇavan kī Vārtā*, edited by Dvārkādās Parīkh (Indore: Vaiṣṇav Mitra Maṇḍal, 2011), 37.

the Vaishnavas is to be understood to be supreme."[8]

Beyond the *puṣṭimārgīy* context, *satsaṅg* is also widely recognized as integral to nine traditionally recognized ways in which to advance along the path of Vaishnava *bhakti*. These nine modes of *bhakti* are famously outlined in the *BhP* as follows: 1) *śravaṇa* or "listening" to the narratives of Krishna, 2) *kīrtana* "singing the praises" of Krishna, 3) *smaraṇa* "remembering" or focusing the mind on Krishna, 4) *pāda-sevana* or ritual "service," 5) *arcana* "worship" of Krishna's form, 6) *vandana* "praising" Krishna, 7) *dāsya* or approaching Krishna with an attitude of "servitude," 8) *sakhya* or approaching Krishna with an attitude of divine "companionship," and 9) *ātma-nivedana* or "self-surrender."[9] *Puṣṭimārgīy satsaṅg* especially incorporates the first three of these nine modes (*śravana*, *kīrtana,* and *smaraṇa*), which are normally enacted through reading and discussing sectarian literature, including *Vārtā Sāhitya*, the *BhP*, and other texts such as the *Śoḍaṣagrantha* and the *Baḍe Śikṣāpatra*. *Kīrtan* attributed to the *aṣṭachāp* poets, as well as *dhoḷ* and *bhajan* attributed to other sectarian poets, may also be the primary focus of *satsaṅg*.[10] Of course each of these nine modes of cultivating *bhakti* is also understood to be enacted through acts of *sevā*, and *satsaṅg* itself is often listed as one of many ways in which *sevā*—loving service—is performed.

[8] Parīkh, *Caurāsī Vaiṣṇavan kī Vārtā* (2011), 1-2.

[9] *BhP*: 7.5.23-24.

[10] The terms *kīrtan maṇḍaḷ* or *maṇḍaḷī* (lit. "circle," or "assembly") are more commonly used to refer to gatherings that emphasize devotional song. Even in the case of groups that focus specifically on the *vārtā*s, devotional songs are typically performed as a way to formally commence and conclude readings and discussion.

I b. *Vacanāmrt* and the question of leadership

While any reading group can be referred to as *satsaṅg*, occasionally devotees will refer to gatherings that are led by members of the Vallabh Kul as *vacanāmṛt* (lit. "nectarous speech"). With respect to the *vārtā*s, the term refers both to the hagiographies themselves, which are attributed to Vallabhacharya's revered descendants, Gokulnath and Hariray, and also to what is believed to be the divinely inspired oral exegesis (*divyā vāṇī*) delivered by Vallabhacharya's living descendants. While all types of oral utterances attributed to the Vallabh Kul can be referred to as *vacanāmṛt*, *Vacanāmṛt Sāhitya* in fact denotes a discrete genre of discourse within the *sampradāy*. Although necessarily oral in origin, *vacanāmṛt* can also be received in written form (e.g., as a transcribed *pravacan*). In its written form, then, *vacanāmṛt* often shares features of the *84VV* and *252VV*'s unique narrative aesthetics, including straightforward storytelling with frequent repetitions and direct or reported speech. Also like the *vārtā*s, written examples of *vacanāmṛt* are normally numbered collections of distinct, yet loosely connected narratives or anecdotes, which both provide hagiographic accounts of persons (living or deceased) or events as well as didactic messages (*siddhānt*). In his introduction to a popular collection called the "One Hundred and Twenty *Vacanāmṛt* of Girdharlal Maharaj" (1831-1878), Vrajeshkumar Maharaj (b. 1939), the current leader of the sect's Third House writes: "The uniqueness of *Vacanāmṛt Sāhitya* is that everything naturally emerges from it," including "philosophical secrets," "historical and social truths," and "sectarian principles." Additionally, Vrajeshkumar Maharaj asserts, *vacanāmṛt* is accessible because, like the *vārtā*s, it is spoken in our "everyday language" and delivered

in a "simple and clear fashion."[11]

Today there are countless collections of *Vacanāmṛt Sāhitya* available either in print or, increasingly, in audio and video mediums. Like the *vacanāmṛt* of Girdharlal Maharaj, many of these collections contain indirect or direct commentary on the *vārtā*s and other sectarian texts. During *satsaṅg* it is common for group leaders and participants not only to offer their own oral exegesis (itself *vacanāmṛt* if they are Vallabh Kul), but also to read aloud from various collections of written *vacanāmṛt*, which offer further commentary on the hagiographies.[12]

I c. Group size and demographics

Reading groups led by male members of the Vallabh Kul tend to be quite large, ranging from twenty-five to over one hundred participants, while those led by *beṭījī*s or *bahūjī*s (daughters or wives of male Vallabh Kul respectively), tend to be smaller, ranging from ten to thirty. Groups led by lay devotees, like the one at the Vallabh Dham temple, are normally smaller than groups led by Vallabhacharya's descendants, ranging from five to fifteen participants.

Most of the men and women I interviewed claimed that all initiated *puṣṭimārgīy* devotees could freely join any type of reading group. However, in practice, the

[11] Vāgīśkumārjī Mahodayśrī, ed., *Śrī Girdharlāljī Mahārājśrī nā 120 Vacanāmṛt* (Vadodara: Vākpati Foundation, 2012), 1.

[12] The choice of which collection of written *vacanāmṛt* is read during reading groups depends upon the particular affiliation that a group's leader and members have to one of the Seven Houses of the *sampradāy*. This is mostly true of groups led by members of the Vallabh Kul, which normally attract only those devotees who have been initiated into the sect by members of the particular House to which the leader belongs. Vallabh Kul commentators on the *vārtā*s, including Shyam Manohar Goswami, in fact refer to their own oral commentaries as *vacanāmṛt*. See: Śyām Manohar Gosvāmī, "*Dāmodardās, Kṛṣṇadās Meghan kī Vārtā Saṅgati*," (Photocopy of unpublished transcription of lecture, 2012), 2.

membership of such groups is rather more specific. In the case of *satsaṅg*s led by devotees, this specificity is often due to pre-existing social (often temple-based) or familial connections, as well as to the relationship known as *guru-bahen* or *guru-bhāī*—that is, being a "sister" or "brother" of a fellow devotee by virtue of having been initiated into the *sampradāy* by the same *guru* or immediate family of male sectarian leaders. In other words, devotees often learn about or decide to start their own *satsaṅg*s based on certain relationships that exist beyond the group itself. Larger groups, especially those led by prominent religious leaders, may advertise meetings on temple websites, in newsletters, or in pamphlets mailed to devotees or distributed or displayed in temple spaces. However, it is more common that individuals learn about reading groups through word of mouth. Indeed, this is how I learned of all of the *satsaṅg*s that I attended.

Lay *satsaṅg* leaders are often avid readers of *puṣṭimārgīy* literature who are deemed both by fellow devotees and religious leaders to be role models in the practice of *sevā*. Such devotees, like Kashmira Sharma, a doctor of obstetrics and gynecology in her early sixties, may initiate a *satsaṅg* by personal choice. Kashmira decided to begin hosting her *satsaṅg* in 2000 after she successfully delivered a son to her *guru*'s wife. Alternatively, a well-respected and knowledgeable devotee may be asked by fellow lay devotees or religious leaders to initiate *satsaṅg*. In both cases, the reason for starting a group often relates to the desire or request to give selflessly to the community and to educate fellow Vaishnavas as an act of *sevā*. *Sevā* of fellow devotees, the *vārtā*s themselves tell us, is just as important as *sevā* of Thakurji or of one's own *guru*. Several lay devotees whom I interviewed told me that they had been given specific *ājñyā*

("instruction" or "permission") by their *guru*s or by Thakurji himself to initiate *satsaṅg* as an act of *sevā*. It is also common for *guru*s to encourage recent *brahmasambandhī*s ("initiates") to join a *satsaṅg* as a way to learn about *siddhānt* and *sevā* etc.[13]

It should be noted here that during my time in Ahmedabad I was never aware of any sense of explicit competition, in terms of attendance or even function, between groups led by lay devotees and those led by their Vallabh Kul counterparts. While some individuals openly disagree with the teachings of their religious leaders, most of the people I spoke with maintained that devotees' commentary on the *vārtā*s could never contend with the Vallabh Kul's *vacanāmṛt,* which is not only considered to be *divyā vāṇī*, and thus inherently beneficial to listen to, but may also be considered to be more "correct" than the commentary offered by lay devotees. That being said, others with whom I spoke explicitly expressed preference for groups led by and for lay devotees *because* of the absence of sectarian authority. Indeed, occasionally lay devotees' discussions during *satsaṅg* relate to the behaviors and qualities (positive or negative) of members of the Vallabh Kul themselves. Moreover, both types of reading groups may be seen as serving distinct purposes. As one lay devotee named Kamala told me:

> Of course I go to the temple for *vacanāmṛt* too. Bava [referring to a member of the Vallabh Kul] has so much knowledge, all Vallabh Kul are very intelligent. But it's such a big crowd and I sit in the back with my son, he comes with me, and we can't hear the *vacanāmṛt* well. We don't ask our questions there in front of everyone. But I am fortunate to hear Bava, aren't I? I should go there. I am so fortunate. In Gitaben's *satsaṅg* I also learn so much: what to do here and there and about *sevā*. In [her] *satsaṅg* I don't feel shy to ask any questions even though I really don't know anything. Some ladies and men sit in front with Bava and talk all the time, but I don't want to ask him anything directly. It doesn't look good, so

[13] Likewise, many of the religious leaders with whom I met suggested that I myself join *satsaṅg* groups as a way to learn about the Vallabh Sampraday and the *vārtā*s specifically.

I also go to *satsaṅg* and ask questions and talk a lot with the other Vaishnavas.[14]

Kamala's statement reveals that her reasons for going to a *satsaṅg* led by a fellow lay devotee, Gita, have to do with the comfort and ease of asking questions and speaking uninhibitedly—without the embarrassment of not "knowing anything," as she says. In Gita's *satsaṅg* Kamala feels comfortable asking questions about the performance of *sevā*. Kamala also expresses, however, that while other devotees engage vocally in meetings where a religious leader is present, her own reason for listening to *vacanāmṛt* at her local temple has as much to do with hearing the "Bava's knowledge" as it does with fulfilling a perceived obligation: "I should go there. I am so fortunate," she says. While in this chapter I will be highlighting dynamic verbal exchanges in which lay devotees are actively engaged with each other and with religious leaders in discussion about the *vārtā*s, Kamala's comment about attending *vacanāmṛt* simply because she "should" and is "fortunate" enough to do so also reflects the sentiments of many of her fellow devotees. Sometimes, in addition to so much else, attending *vārtā* reading groups can be about performing a perceived duty or about the comfort of listening to religious literature being read aloud in the company of one's own community. In other words, seemingly passive participation should not be overlooked as disengaged or meaningless. As I discuss further below, "meaning-making," which is very often the framework in which "religion" and "storytelling" are discussed in scholarly circles, is not necessarily the best

[14] Personal Communication, February 16th, 2012. *Bāvā* or *bābā* in this context is a term of respect and endearment reserved for male members of the Vallabh Kul who are not the eldest direct descendants of their particular lineage (the eldest direct descendant of a lineage is called *mahārāj*). The term *bāvā* is often used for male children of the Vallabh Kul.

way of approaching religious narratives or the people who tell or listen to these narratives.[15]

I d. Venues and timing

Devotees' ability and desires to join reading groups are also influenced by the venue and the timing and frequency of meetings. Larger groups like the one referred to by Kamala often meet once a week in one of the sectarian temples where religious leaders maintain explicit affiliation or keep their primary residence.[16] Larger temples have sizeable meeting halls for such events, which are called *dīvān-e-ām* ("public meeting hall")[17] in the older and more traditionally constructed *havelī*s, and simply *sabhā hol* ("meeting hall") in the more recently established temples. Groups that meet regularly in these spaces are normally scheduled directly after a temple's penultimate or final *darśan* period in the evening and typically last for one to three hours. While all temples administer the standard eight daily performances of *sevā* (*aṣṭayām sevā*) associated with the Vallabh Sampraday and other Vaishnava sects, they are normally only open for public *darśan* four to five times during the day—starting early in the morning and, depending on the season and other events in the sectarian calendar, ending around seven o'clock in the

[15] Orsi, *Between Heaven and Earth*, 112.

[16] See Chapter Three for a description of different kinds of temples.

[17] As I have indicated in previous chapters, the Vallabh Sampraday had close relationships with both Rajput and Mughal courts during the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Because of these connections, certain features of *puṣṭimārgīy havelī*s are similar to and are often named after architectural features specific to these premodern courts. It is therefore common in the sectarian context to use the Persianate phrase *dīvān-e-ām* to refer to the "public hall" of a *havelī*.

evening when the temple's resident *svarūp*s are put to sleep for the night.[18] Final *darśan* periods of the day are highly attended as evenings best accommodate devotees of various demographics: professional men and women are returning home from work, students have been dismissed from school, and those who attend to domestic matters, such as preparing meals, normally feel free to leave home during this time. Sundays, which are typically non-working days for middle-class residents of Ahmedabad, are especially busy times at sectarian temples, and reading groups that are held in temple spaces are therefore often scheduled on Sunday evenings.

While smaller *satsaṅg*s led by devotees may also convene at local temples (e.g., the Vallabh Dham reading group), such meetings are more commonly held in devotees' private homes. The individuals who host and sometimes lead *satsaṅg*s are often, although not exclusively, among the more affluent members of the community who have spacious homes that accommodate such meetings. Accordingly, the homes of many *satsaṅg* hosts are situated in affluent neighborhoods of Ahmedabad's "new-city," to the west of the Sabarmati river. This can mean that *satsaṅg* participants who live in parts of the "old-city," to the east of the Sabarmati, or in distant suburbs, must travel quite a distance in order to reach a *satsaṅg* meeting. As the city's demographics continue to shift and more and more *puṣṭimārgīy* families relocate to both urban areas of Ahmedabad's "new-city" and into the suburbs, the demand for new local *satsaṅg* meetings, and for new temples, continues to grow. Even during the three years that I was actively involved in studies and dissertation research in and around Ahmedabad (2009-2012), I was introduced to six

[18] For further detail on the timing of *sevā* in *puṣṭimārgīy* temples, see: Ambalal, *Krishna as Shrinathji*, 336.

distinct groups that had only just taken shape within the preceding nine months.[19] These groups seemed to successfully accommodate devotees living in discrete and sometimes far-flung regions of the city, as well as those who had specific scheduling conflicts with other pre-existing *satsaṅg*s. According to the leader of one *satsaṅg* that I visited regularly: "there is more and more interest for *satsaṅg*s to be established in each and every 'society' [an Indian housing scheme], but people keep moving out, farther and farther away. Three ladies have left my group this year because they live with their sons and daughter-in-laws who have taken larger homes in the suburbs. Even with Ahmedabad's recently built city-wide rapid-transit bus system, not everyone can easily travel such a distance."[20]

While reading groups led by members of the Vallabh Kul often meet on Sunday evenings in order to accommodate the maximum number of devotees, many smaller *satsaṅg*s are planned according to individual participants' schedules. Kashmira Sharma, for instance, hosts her *satsaṅg* on Wednesday and Friday evenings because these are the days that she is available for walk-in appointments at her gynecology clinic, which is located in the first floor of her large suburban home.[21] This schedule also suits Kashmira's regular thirteen *satsaṅg* participants—all women who are able to leave their respective places of employment or homes in time to meet with fellow devotees for

[19] Likewise, countless small-scale temples funded by trusts or directly by local community members were established during my time in Ahmedabad.

[20] Personal Communication, November 12th, 2011.

[21] Kashmira tries to avoid interruptions during her three-hour-long *satsaṅg*, but occasionally does step out to take phone calls or to attend to urgent matters in her clinic.

nearly three hours each Wednesday and Friday. Kashmira's *satsaṅg* schedule, which has participants meeting for five to six hours each week, is only slightly out of the ordinary: most groups meet for an average of three hours weekly throughout the entire year.

In most of the *satsaṅg*s that I attended, participants would read both the *84VV* and *252VV*, as well as other sectarian texts, from start to finish, skipping few if any episodes, and without any particular emphasis on which time of year or in which season they should commence or conclude their readings. "We start at the beginning and we read until we are finished," Kashmira once told me straightforwardly. "We have been reading like this for twelve whole years," Kashmira tells me of her *satsaṅg*, "so we have read through all of the *vārtā*s, and other *granth*s ("texts") too, over twelve times." Normally in one *satsaṅg* meeting (which lasts one to three hours), a group will read and discuss anywhere from one to six *vārtā*s. Kashmira also tells me that she, like the other avid readers with whom I spoke, also reads small selections from the *84VV* and *252VV* outside of the context of *satsaṅg*, often each night before sleep: "If we read everyday, just one *prasaṅg*, we are reminded of so many things. Each and every *prasaṅg* will give us support daily. Sometimes we might return to a *prasaṅg* for some particular reason, to remember some *siddhānt*—or maybe we just recall a *prasaṅg* and smile and then sleep more easily that night."[22] The comfort found in the regularity of reading the *vārtā*s (and other sectarian literature) as a practice that occurs both during *satsaṅg* and as part of the individual devotee's daily routine, highlights not only the deeply ritualized quality of religious reading, but also the ways in which the *vārtā*s mark the emotional and practical

[22] Personal Communication, May 23rd, 2012.

lives of readers in subtle and profound ways. I return to this matter below.

I e. Gender matters

Women normally outnumber men as regular participants in any kind of *vārtā* reading group or temple activity, and are frequently the primary practitioners of Thakurji's *sevā* in the home. While men, women, youth, and children were present and active at all of the larger groups led by Vallabh Kul that I attended, women (of all ages) normally accounted for three-quarters of regular participants. This was similarly the case for devotee-led *satsaṅg*s that were joined by both men and women. While I was never aware of any exclusively male *satsaṅg*s in Ahmedabad (or elsewhere), women-only reading groups—led either by *beṭījī*s, *bahūjī*s, or by lay devotees like Kashmira Sharma, are extremely common.[23] Five of the nine *satsaṅg*s that I visited regularly in Ahmedabad were women-only. "It's not that women have more time for *satsaṅg*," Kumud Kaveri explained to me. "In fact women are busier than men—many of us work professionally and also do work in the home even if we have a *kām vāḷī* (a "female domestic worker"). Women always get up earlier and go to bed later. But it's true that men go to work at jobs located farther away [from the home]."[24] Age and life-stage are, of course, also factors in devotees' ability and desire to participate regularly in *satsaṅg*. While reading groups are typically diverse—including devotees whose ages range from late twenties to seventies—

[23] When there is no formal reading group or other activity scheduled at a temple, however, and a male member of the Vallabh Kul is present, it is common for men to informally congregate around him and for women to gather separately with female members of the Vallabh Kul. I was told by Tilak Goswami that men approach him with personal questions and ask for advice on matters relating to family, occupation, etc. As a woman, these informal male gatherings were not spaces that I could easily or comfortably join.

[24] Personal Communication, November 22nd, 2011.

the majority of regular participants are middle-aged.[25] The reason for the prominence of this demographic seems to be clearly related to both professional and domestic commitments, as suggested by Kumud Kaveri. Men and women who have grown children and either have retired or work less frequently outside of the home than their younger counterparts simply have more time to devote to religious activities than they did in earlier years.[26]

However, "the real reason that women go to *satsaṅg* more and do *sevā* more frequently," Kumud explained, "is that women have more *bhāv* ("emotion," "affection," or "passion") than men." While male devotees often explained that the reason for women's more active participation in religious activities had to do with men's professional commitments, female devotees repeatedly referred to women's naturally heightened *bhāv* as the primary factor in the difference between men and women's practices. When asked to clarify this claim, female devotees pointed to non-sectarian specific female role-models in Krishna narratives, such as the *gopī*s (or *sakhī*s) or Krishna's foster-mother Yashoda, as examples of how female figures had more *bhāv* than men. "Women have more *bhāv* because we naturally are enamored, like the *gopī*s, and

[25] Asking directly about people's ages is generally considered rude (especially when asking women). Furthermore, acquiring details about individuals' ages has not been important for the purposes of this study.

[26] This issue of gender and life-stage is similarly discussed here: Mary E. Hancock, "The Dilemmas of Domesticity: Possession and Devotional Experience Among Urban Smārta Women," in *From the Margins of Hindu Marriage: Essays on Gender, Religion, and Culture*, edited by Lindsey Harlan and Paul B. Courtright (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 61. It should also be noted that children and youth, who occasionally join *satsaṅg* gatherings, are more actively engaged with sectarian literature through classes and activities specifically tailored for them. Summer camps, Sunday classes, and other youth networks are common, but fall outside the purview of this study.

we naturally know how to care for Thakurji—he is a child in our own homes and we are like his mother, like Mother Yashoda," one woman stated.[27] Men can do this too, but for women it is more natural." This sentiment is rather common to other *bhakti* traditions, and to classical *bhakti* literature, where even male devotees take on the form or voice of a woman in order to more successfully approach the divine.[28] As I was often reminded, all of the characters whose narratives are told in the *84VV* and *252VV*—whether men or women, royalty or downtrodden—were *daivī jīv*s and thus maintained *alaukik* roles as *sakhī*s in *nitya līlā*. However very few devotees with whom I spoke pointed to female characters from the *vārtā*s as examples of why women have increased *bhāv*. Indeed, while the hagiographies certainly do offer a gendered commentary on ideal devotion and social behavior through the *Bhāvprakāś*, the narratives do not explicitly identify women as somehow more spiritually aware or as more inclined to participate in *satsaṅg* or *sevā* than their male counterparts. Devotees with whom I spoke maintained that all *brahmasambandhī*s had the same potential to cultivate intimate relationships with Thakurji, and therefore to thirst for activities such as *sevā* and *satsaṅg*—activities that help increase one's *bhāv*.

Conclusion: The benefits of *satsaṅg*

What else might we consider when making sense of why women are the primary actors in *satsaṅg* and *sevā*? What might these considerations tell us about the primary

[27] Personal Communication, November 29th, 2011.

[28] Normally the inclination to inhabit a woman's persona or to speak in a woman's voice is described in relation to the divine-erotic (*śṛṅgār* or *mādhurya*) *bhāv*, rather than the parental or maternal (*vātsalya*) *bhāv*.

functions and perceived benefits of these activities to begin with? In her book, *Guests at God's Wedding: Celebrating Kartik Among the Women of Benaras*, Tracy Pintchman asserts that whether or not women consider themselves to be more engaged in or responsible for religious activities than men, the devotional and social space provided by women-only gatherings can be inherently productive for women. For example, Pintchman's informants stated that one of the key benefits of participating in women's group ritual was the cultivation of female friendships—specifically the cultivation *prem* ("love"), sharing of intimate stories from women's everyday lives, and emotional support.[29] The *puṣṭimārgīy* women with whom I spoke similarly expressed that *mitratā* ("friendship") was a benefit of *satsaṅg*, but did not emphasize that it was necessary or even primary. Rather, what was understood to be primary in *satsaṅg* was the group's cultivation of *bhāv* and the clarification of *siddhānt*, which most claimed could be achieved in the company of men and women—and with or without the leadership of members of the Vallabh Kul. Nonetheless, female devotees did express that women-only *satsaṅg* has the potential to cultivate a distinct environment in which issues that women feel most comfortable discussing in the company of other women—including discord in the home, especially with spouses and in-laws, and issues of purity and pollution around menstruation—can be raised. Also, "I am a woman, so I naturally learn more from other women [than from men] about how to do *sevā* correctly and how to make my home a

[29] Tracy Pintchman, *Guests at God's Wedding: Celebrating Kartik Among the Women of Benares* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), 150.

puṣṭimārgīy home," one devotee told me. [30]

However, what I hope to demonstrate in this chapter, and to have demonstrated throughout this dissertation, is that *all* devotees, whether male or female, read the *vārtā*s as a way in which to perform devotion and to discuss and reinterpret ideals inherited from the past in terms of contemporary realities of the present. Philosopher Paul Ricoeur speaks to this aspect of reading when he describes how all active readers naturally "appropriate" texts as they seek to interpret and make sense of them: "interpretation brings together, equalizes, renders contemporary and similar…"[31] While women are often the most active participants in *satsaṅg* and *sevā* activities, and while female-centered spaces do afford women the comfort of gender-specific discourse, the issues that women discuss are rarely perceived to be "women's issues" per se.[32] Rather, issues that women and men discuss are explicitly understood to be "family" or "*puṣṭimārgīy*" issues, which are therefore equally important to all members of the community.

In this section of the chapter, and in Chapter Three, I have already suggested several of the ways in which *satsaṅg* is perceived by devotees to be beneficial: it is a place to increase one's *bhāv*, to learn about *siddhānt* and *sevā*, to negotiate between ideals inherited from the past and realities of the present, and to share individuals' personal experiences as caretakers of Thakurji and as social and familial actors. All of

[30] Personal Communication, January 4th, 2012.

[31] Paul Ricoeur, *From Text to Action: Essays in Hermeneutics II*, translated by Kathleen Blamey and John B. Thompson (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1986), 119.

[32] Pintchman's book and other recent studies on women and ritual also address the ways in which female ritual practitioners appropriate and transform predominant traditions in ways that reflect women's "this-worldly" concerns and desires—"empowering" women "by both their cultural traditions and their female natures" (Pintchman, *Guests at God's Wedding*, 194).

these benefits relate, I suggest, to the formation of relationships. The practices of religious reading are therefore not best approached in terms of "meaning-making," as is often suggested by scholars of religion, but rather in terms of (re)articulating sectarian identities and making and maintaining meaningful relationships—relationships between fellow humans, and between humans and God.[33]

Part II: Three *Vārtā* Reading Groups

In what follows I offer accounts of three of the nine reading groups that I visited regularly in Ahmedabad city. The first group is an all women's *satsaṅg* led by the lay devotee Kashmira Sharma, whom I introduced in the previous section. The second group that I discuss is led by Raja Betiji (the sister of a *mahārāj* living in Ahmedabad), and the third is a group led by Tilak Goswami, Raja Betiji's nephew. While the ritual contexts and participants of each group are distinct, we will see how the discussions that arise in all three groups touch on overlapping themes.

II a. Harmonizing *sevā, satsaṅg,* and *laukik* obligations

At 5.30 on a humid June evening in Ahmedabad's western neighborhood of Vasana, a three-hour long session of reading the *84VV* and *252VV* begins with the performance of a *dhoḷ* ("hymn") by the nineteenth-century Gujarati poet, Dayaram: *śri guru yugapada kamaḷaraja, huṃ nitya dharī nema…*[34]

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[33] Orsi, *Between Heaven and Earth*, 112.

[34] *…duḥkha haraṇa sukha śreyanidhi phala dāyak bhakti prema //1// Śrīvallabha Śrīviṭṭhala prabhu Śrīkṛṣṇa pūraṇa kāma; corāśī mahā bhakta tehnāṃ, karūṃ varṇana nāma //2// jenuṃ smaraṇa karyā thakī, agha duḥkha kleśapaḷāya; puṣṭi pantha prabhu prasanna hoya, mahāpatti*

Taking a vow, I bow daily to the pollen-dust on the lotus feet of my Guru;
Remover of sorrow, Treasure of joy, Giver of the fruit of devotion and love.

Here I describe by name those eighty-four great devotees,
Who fulfilled the purpose of Shri Vallabh, Shri Vitthal, and Lord Krishna.

Through this act of remembrance, sin, sorrow, and grief are soothed;
For this Pushtimarg pleases the Lord, making pure even the greatest sinner.

The mind has been deceived: success is swiftly gained by singing this list of names. To those who sing them, Shri Mahaprabhuji gives the gift of divine joy![35]

The above lines, which commence Dayaram's praise-poem called the *Caurāsī Dhoḷ* ("*84 Dhol*"), are sung along with other devotional songs and prayers at the start of each *satsaṅg* led and hosted by Kashmira Sharma. As the *Caurāsī Dhoḷ* is quite long, offering the names and signifying qualities of all eighty-four of the primary devotees whose narratives are told in the *84VV*, the women of Kashmira's *satsaṅg* typically perform only the opening lines of the song, as well as several additional verses, which correspond to the *vārtā*s that will read during any given meeting.

Once the ritual of *satsaṅg* has been initiated with the performance of the *dhoḷ*, the thirteen women who are gathered in Kashmira's living-room open their copies of the *Coryāsī Vaiṣṇavo nī Vārtāo*—a contemporary Gujarati translation of the *84VV*.[36] Even though carpenters are busy renovating the roof of Kashmira's three story home and her

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pāvana thāya //3// mana vanchita, phaḷa śīghra pāme, gātāṃ e abhidhāna; Śrīmahāprabhujī nijānndanjuṃ kare tehne dāna //4//

[35] I thank Goswami Anandbava for graciously assisting me in my translation of the *Caurāsī Dhoḷ*. All mistakes are my own. My translation is based on a reading group's oral performance on June 22nd, 2012 in Ahmedabad.

[36] Rameśbhāī V. Parīkh, trans., "Coryāsī Vaiṣṇavo nī Vārtāo: Tūm Bīn Tattva Kachu nahī Jagmeṃ (84 Bhagavadīya tatva Vicār)," in *Puṣṭimārgīy Patrācār: Śuddhādvait Sevābhūṣaṇ*, edited by Rameśbhāī V. Parīkh (Vadodara: Śrī Vākpati Foundation, 2002), 291-448 .

two young grandsons are watching television in the next room, the low buzz of the air-conditioner drowns out the noise, making it remarkably peaceful in the small living room where the *satsaṅg* participants, comfortably seated on couches or supported by cushions on the cream-colored marble floor, have gathered to read. Kashmira signals to a woman named Dipa, seated to her left, to begin reading aloud to the group. The *prasaṅg* that Dipa reads comes from the *vārtā* of a devotee named Purushottamdas and his wife, two *kṣatriya* devotees from Agra.[37] We may summarize the episode as follows:

> When Purushottamdas and his wife meet Shri Acharyaji [Vallabhacharya] they prostrate themselves and ask for initiation. Shri Acharyaji initiates the couple, giving man and wife *mālā*s (religious "necklaces") to wear around their necks as marks of their new Vaishnava identities. However, when Purushottamdas asks to be given permission to perform Thakurji's *sevā*, Shri Acharyaji tells the couple that their mothers are *asurī jīv*s ("wicked souls"), and so they must wait some time before beginning *sevā*. Indeed, when the couple's mothers discover that their children are wearing *mālā*s they become upset, thinking: "our children have become ascetics!" Purushottamdas explains that wearing the *mālā*s does not mean that he and his wife have become ascetics, or that they have shunned their families or caste values. Furthermore, the mothers may still share the family home. "However," Purushottamdas clarifies, "unless you also receive initiation from Shri Acharyaji, we will not accept food and water from your hands." Hearing this, the mothers become enraged: "do you wish to disgrace us and our community? We might as well die!" Indeed, during the night the mothers drown themselves in the household well. After completing the last rites, the couple goes to Shri Acharyaji who says that now they can perform *sevā*.[38]

When Dipa finishes reading the account, Kashmira initiates discussion by asserting that the Purushottamdas' *vārtā* "intimately describes the anguish" experienced

[37] Refer to the Appendix (Example B) for a full translation of this account from: Parīkh, *Caurāsī Vaiṣṇavan kī Vārtā* (2011).

[38] My translated synopsis of what was being read aloud in Gujarati comes from: Parīkh, "Coryāsī Vaiṣṇavo nī Vārtāo," 399.

when families of Vaishnavas do not understand the *puṣṭi* lifestyle.[39] As we recall from Chapter One, tension between demands of familial and caste-based expectations and sectarian specific commitments are recurrent themes in the *84VV* and *252VV*, and one of the most widely discussed issues for readers today.[40] Kashmira continues:

> I was also deluded once—I was also thinking that my husband and in-laws must be some sort of ascetics! They wouldn't even let me in the kitchen after marriage until they had taken me to get *brahmasambandh*. Even after initiation, I was completely ignorant: I didn't know anything, not even how to say *Jai Shri Krishna* ("Hail to Lord Krishna," the standard greeting between most *puṣṭimārgīy* devotees).

Kashmira explains that while at first she neither understood nor felt compelled to follow the religious observances of her husband's family, it was natural in her position as new daughter-in-law to appease her spouse and in-laws. "Don't misunderstand," Kashmira says adamantly, "I am not saying that you should force your *bahū*s to become Vaishnavas! I naturally felt compelled to follow along…and before long," Kashmira says, placing her hands to her heart, "I had replaced the *Hanumān Cālīsā* [a non-sectarian Awadhi poem about Hanuman as the ideal devotee of Lord Ram] with the *Yamunāṣṭakam*!" Kashmira launches into the first verse of the *Yamunāṣṭakam*, Vallabhacharya's Sanskrit praise poem about the river goddess Yamuna and her singular

[39] All translated dialogue was originally spoken in Gujarati unless otherwise noted.

[40] In the contemporary context there are many reasons why the members of a *puṣṭimārgīy* devotee's family may not share the same religious affiliation. The most common way that this happens is through marriage. While marriage trends are, in many ways, changing quite rapidly among upper middle-class communities in Ahmedabad, it is still quite common for marriages to be partially or fully arranged by elder family members. In many cases, this means that families will choose to arrange marriages based on caste-based community affiliations, rather than by religious affiliation. It is very common, for example, for practicing *puṣṭimārgīy* devotees to marry into Swaminarayan families. Many religious leaders, including Shyam Manohar Goswami, have told me that in this case of intermarriage the practicing devotee should either request permission to continue performing *sevā* or, if not given permission, renounce his or her *sevā* practices.

devotion to Lord Krishna. Kashmira raises her hands, encouraging others to join in: *namāmi yamunāmahaṁ sakalasiddhihetum mudā*...(I bow joyfully to Yamuna, the source of all spiritual powers…").[41] "But let's return to Purushottamdas and his wife," Kashmira says, wrapping up her own observations:

> The reason Shri Acharyaji called their mothers wicked was because they tried to take away the *mālā*s. But according to me, they were merely ignorant. Sisters: Shri Acharyaji would never permit us to disrespect our mothers and fathers. We are not to understand from this account that we are permitted to remove ourselves from our families…even if they are, like I was once, ignorant of our *puṣṭi* lifestyle. As long as Thakurji does not suffer we must show some patience.

Kashmira concludes with a quotation from the *Vivekadhairyāśraya*, one of Vallabhacharya's treatises from the *Ṣoḍaśagrantha*: *pratīkāro yaddṛcchātaḥ siddhaścennāgrahī bhavet/bhāryādīnāṁ tathānyeṣāmasataścākramaṁ sahte //7//* ("But if a remedy of [one's suffering] should chance to occur, one should not stubbornly insist [on continuing to suffer]. One should, however, patiently endure the wrongs committed [against oneself] by wife and children, household, and others").[42] Kashmira then loosely translates the verse into Gujarati: "we must be patient, even when our families treat us badly." Hearing this, the other women nod in agreement, clearly impressed with the connection that Kashmira has made between the *vārtā* and Vallabhacharya's treatise, and with her ability to recall and recite the Sanskrit verse with seeming ease.

Kashmira's reference to Vallabhacharya's treatise, while certainly impressive (her fine Sanskrit skills are well-known in the local community), represents a common practice. Like the *Bhāvprakāś* and other contemporary commentaries on the *84VV* and

[41] Redington, *The Grace of Lord Krishna*, 1.

[42] Ibid., 96.

252VV, readers of the hagiographies are quick to make intertextual references in *satsaṅg*. While occasionally such references lead to formal or more in depth readings from a text that a reader has cited, it is more common that a reader will only mention or briefly recite from a text in order to reinforce or challenge a point that has been made in conversation.

Kashmira finally opens the floor for whatever further reflections, questions, and discussion may be stimulated by the reading of Purushottamdas' *vārtā*. During the next two hours many women share personal experiences and reactions. Dipa describes how she is the only practicing *puṣṭimārgīy* devotee in her family—having married into a family from her same caste group, but with different religious affiliations—and that she frequently experiences criticism from her husband and two teenaged boys, who do not follow the widely recognized food restrictions of the *sampradāy*. Such restrictions include routine and seasonal fasting, as well as maintaining a pure vegetarian diet and only accepting meals that have first been offered to one's household *svarūp* (the consecrated food offering is then taken by the devotee as *prasād*). These dietary restrictions, while highly debated, preclude some observant members of the sect from eating in other people's homes or in restaurants—leisure activities that are otherwise considered common for many middle-class residents of Ahmedabad. "But I don't complain," Dipa continues, "I make the food that my family asks for and then ritually purify myself. It is not suitable behavior for a Vaishnava to make complaints."

Another woman, Kishori, chimes in: "it's true, sister, and my own *guru* also says the same." Kishori recounts a story told to her by her *guru* about a disciple that had caused her husband to file for a divorce. According to Kishori's story, the reason for the

divorce stemmed from the fact that the *puṣṭimārgīy* wife complained incessantly about the fact that her spouse had not taken sectarian initiation and therefore could not participate in Thakurji's *sevā*. Her *guru* "blamed the Vaishnava lady for the divorce," Kishori explains, "not her husband!" The lesson here, Kishori concludes, is that one should not force one's family members to adopt a *puṣṭi* lifestyle, nor should the behavior of one's family inhibit one's own *bhāv*. "My husband is a Mahadev *bhakta* (that is, a devotee of Mahadev, or Lord Shiva). He lives in *maryādā* (that is, he does not live as a *puṣṭimārgīy* devotee). But I do my *sevā* and he does his *pūjā* and we have *saṃvād* ("harmony") in our home," Kishori, a new member of the group, says looking expectantly around the room.[43] "Like Kashmiraben said, we must show some patience. If our families don't harass us, then this is all that we can desire. The most important thing is to refrain from causing Thakurji any *śram* ("exertion")." "This sister [Kishori] is just like that Ramanandi's wife," another *satsaṅg* participant interjects, referring to an oft-cited narrative from the *252VV* about a devout *puṣṭimārgīy* woman who manages to live peacefully with her husband, even though he is a devotee of Lord Ram. The women chuckle at the comparison, which seems to please Kishori, who goes on to narrate the details of her relationship with her husband.

Discussion and further readings continue in this vein for over two hours. When the meeting nears an end Kashmira's daughter-in-law Shital and son Arup, both doctors

[43] It is extremely common, both in sectarian texts and in *satsaṅg* discussions, for comparisons to be made between *sevā* and *pūjā*. *Pūjā* is a generic term used in many Indian languages to describe "worship; adoration (of a deity etc.)" (McGregor, *The Oxford Hindi-English Dictionary*, 640). *Sevā* ("loving service") is described by *puṣṭimārgīy* devotees to differ from *pūjā* because the former involves "actual communication with the divine as a fully manifest form," while the latter is mere "idol worship" (Sumit Sharma, Personal Communication, March 16th, 2012).

who have just returned from work, slip in to the *satsaṅg* room with cold water and *prasād* (sweets, in this case). Shital and Arup both join Kashmira and the other women in a concluding performance of the poet Surdas' most popular *kīrtan*, which is sung at the conclusion of nearly every gathering of *puṣṭimārgīy* devotees:

> *bharoso draṛha ina caranana kerau /*
> *Śrī Vallabha nakha candra chaṭā binu saba jagmāṃjha aṃdherao //1//…*
>
> Without firm trust in Vallabh's feet, which have toenails reflecting the moon's splendor, everything in the world is dark…[44]

With this, the *satsaṅg* session concludes. Kashmira reminds the other women of where they will pick up in the reading during their next meeting and they all bid farewell—a chorus of "Jai Shri Krishna."

This account of Kashmira's *satsaṅg* reveals the ways in which readers of the *vārtā*s weave the narratives into the everyday fabric of family dynamics, social exchanges, religious thought, and ritual practice. In this context, the hagiographies' protagonists are perceived to be more than simply proverbial characters—they are vividly real figures whose experiences directly resonate with the lived realities of contemporary devotees. Women even describe one another in hagiographical tropes ("this sister is just like that Ramanandi's wife"), and in turn fellow *vārtā* protagonists take on the qualities

[44] This particular *pad* is featured in Surdas' *vārtā* in the *84VV*. As John Stratton Hawley has written about in his work on Surdas, the authors of the *84VV* make a point of citing this particular poem to show that the *pada*'s line, "*Śrīvallabha nakha candra chaṭā*," refers specifically to Vallabhacharya. This is significant because this would be the *only* example of a poem attributed to Surdas that has any reference to Vallabhacharya by name or otherwise. Hawley suggests that even in this case *vallabha* does not in fact refer to Vallabhacharya, but more simply to "beloved" (*Śrī* + *vallabha* is a common epithet for Vishnu as the lover of Shri (Lakshmi)). For further on the *84VV*'s efforts to establish Surdas as a distinctly sectarian poet, see: Hawley, *Sūrdās: Poet Singer, Saint*, 12-22; *Three Bhakti Voices*, 181-193. For further on Surdas' *pada* in the liturgical canon of *kīrtan* in the *sampradāy*, see: Ho, "The Liturgical Music of the Puṣṭi Mārg of India," 324. The *pada* as cited can be found here: Parīkh, *Caurāsī Vaiṣṇavan kī Vārtā* (2011), 469.

of living devotees. Just as Purushottamdas and his wife are shown to struggle to explain their new faith commitments to uninitiated family members, the women of Kashmira's *satsaṅg* discussed how they also faced challenges in learning how to balance sectarian prescriptions and familial obligations—often referred to as *kauṭumbik mūlyo* ("family values").[45] Moreover, domestic stability and the successful performance of sectarian identity (e.g., wearing the *tulsī mālā*, performing Thakurji's *sevā*, etc.) are considered to be interdependent: "if Thakurji is unhappy, then the Vaishnava is unhappy; and if the Vaishnava is unhappy, then Thakurji cannot endure this," one participant of Kashmira's *satsaṅg* explained to me in a private interview.[46] Another devotee named Saloni, whom I met through a different reading group, echoed this statement when she recounted her disregard for the figure Mirabai—the sixteenth-century poet-saint who is said to have rejected her husband's family because she claimed Krishna as her divine partner.[47] "Some say that she was a great devotee," Saloni explains, but "she was crazed in her devotion, she was selfish and took her own life instead of doing Krishna's *sevā*…Krishna is part of our family."

Theses kinds of intimate devotional relationships between a devotee and his or her household deity are central to many of the *vārtā*s in the *84VV* and *252VV* narratives and continue to be articulated both by individual devotees and in public religious discourse. As one contemporary *vārtā* commentator writes:

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[45] This is most likely a calque of the English phrase.

[46] Personal Communication, March 3rd, 2012.

[47] For further on the figure of Mirabai, see: Hawley, *Three Bhakti Voices,* 89-178.

> Thakurji will slowly begin to take shape according to [your relationship with him] and will begin to identify with each and every member of your family. Thakurji's involvement will increase as he becomes a family member, becoming woven into your family's *kathā* ("tale").[48] [As it is written in the *Bhaktivardhinī*:] *gṛhe sthitvā svadharmataḥ*.[49]

The brief excerpt quoted from Vallabhacharya's *Bhaktivardhinī*, a treatise also found in the *Ṣoḍaśagrantha*, means "remain a householder and follow one's own *dharma.*" The larger context for this citation is Vallabhacharya's instruction to accept the traditional prescriptions of *varṇāśramadharma* and to live, whenever possible, within the social network of one's own family: while everything should be "dedicated" (*samarpit*) to Krishna, the devotee is not encouraged to live removed from the social world.[50] Why? Because removing oneself from the social world feeds the ego, which, as one member of the Vallabh Kul, Goswami Anandabava, explains, "is the opposite of LOVE." Krishna, he continues, "will never accept a jeev [*jīv*] impure with conceit, for where there is ego, pure love cannot blossom."[51] The *vārtā* of Purushottamdas and his wife playfully engages with the sectarian value of maintaining a householder lifestyle when the two mothers mistake their children's new Vaishnava identities, represented by the *mālā*s, for a choice to leave their particular caste community and to shun their families. Purushottamdas and

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[48] *Kathā* can be translated as "tale," but in the Vaishnava context specifically refers to the recitation of and oral commentary on the *BhP*. *Kathā* can also be used to refer to readings of and commentaries on the *vārtā*s.

[49] Bhūpendra Bhāṭiyā, *Ṣoḍaśagranthāgat Upadeś ane tem-nī 28 Vārtāo (Bhāg 2)* (Rajkot: Purvī Press, 2008), 13.

[50] For further on Vallabhacharya's positions on renunciation, see: Smith, "*Saṃnyāsanirṇaya*, a Śuddhādvaita Text on Renunciation by Vallabhacharya," 135-156.

[51] Goswami Anandbava, August 21st, 2011. "The Ego in Pushtimarg: The slip between the Cup and the Lip." Accessed August 13th, 2012. http://pushtimarg.com/anandbava/2011/the-ego-in-pushtimarg-the-slip-between-the-cup-and-the-lip/.

his wife are, of course, *not* to be taken as ascetics and their attempt to explain this to their indignant mothers is highlighted in the narrative. While the rather histrionic end to the two mothers is found to be somewhat objectionable to Kashmira and her *satsaṅg* members ("Shri Acharyaji would never permit us to disrespect our mothers and fathers," Kashmira told her group), reading Purushottamdas' narrative opened the floor for discussion on the matter of how devotees should negotiate between being devotional caretakers of Thakurji on the one hand, and mothers, daughters, wives, etc. on the other.

II b. *Anyāśray* ("depending on another")

Across the city from Kashmira's home, another *satsaṅg* group further articulates the issue of harmonizing sectarian commitments and *kauṭumbik mūlyo*. Raja Betiji, a female descendant of Vallabhacharya, hosts this gathering of thirty men and women in her suburban home each Thursday afternoon. Raja has been leading this *satsaṅg* for nearly twenty years, since the time that she married and left her home and family at the Goswami Haveli, located in the heart of Ahmedabad's "old city." Now Raja Betiji lives and holds her weekly *satsaṅg* quite a distance from her former home, in a northwestern suburb of Ahmedabad's "new city." Raja's *satsaṅg* is conducted in a similar manner to the one led by Kashmira Sharma. The most visible difference is that before commencing and after concluding the meeting, all *satsaṅg* participants will respectfully touch Raja's feet (*caran-sparś* or "touching of the feet")—a commonly performed practice for devotees when they come into contact with any descendant of Vallabhacharya.

According to Raja, devotees come to her *satsaṅg* to learn about sectarian principles and correct *sevā* practices, and to cultivate both *bhāv* and *vaiṣṇavtā*, or

"Vaishnava-ness." As she explained it to me, the *84VV* and *252VV* represent many different streams of *sevā* practice and *vaiṣṇavtā*, but as a whole, the narratives reveal the "essence" of Vallabhacharya's teachings and how these teachings should be realized in one's everyday life. While Raja is indeed frequently questioned about *sevā* and *siddhānt*, the way in which she runs her *satsaṅg* also allows for her participants to be freely vocal, to help answer each other's questions, and to debate certain issues—"healthy *puṣṭi* debate," as she calls it.

One such debate in Raja's *satsaṅg* sprang from reading the *vārtā* of Damodardas Sambhalvare, a figure from the *84VV,* who was said to have lived in the town of Kannauj, in today's Uttar Pradesh.[52] In one episode, Vallabhacharya asks his disciple Damodardas if there is anything that he desires. Damodardas replies: "aside from your grace, there is nothing that I desire." Vallabhacharya then tells his disciple: "ask your wife if she desires anything." When Damodardas' wife says that she wishes to have a son, Vallabhacharya tells her: "a son will come." Several days later Damodardas' wife becomes pregnant. However, to confirm her pregnancy, she consults a fortune-teller who is passing through town.[53] "Yes," the fortune-teller reassures the mother-to-be: "a son will come." When Damodardas again meets with his *guru*, Vallabhacharya tells him: "don't touch me! By consulting someone other than myself on this matter, your wife has committed the

[52] The *vārtā* was read aloud in Gujarati from: Parīkh, *Coryāsī Vaiṣṇavo nī Vārtāo*, 131-132.

[53] I have used the term "fortune-teller" to translate the Gujarati word *teliyo rājā*. The term is explained as: "a Tantrik who bathes in oil, or puts on clothes dripping with oil and pretends to tell future events by looking into the oil" (P.G. Deśpāṇḍe, *Gujarātī-Angrejī Koś* (Ahmedabad: University Granth-nirmāṇ Board, 2002), 459).

offence of *anyāśray* ("depending on another")!"[54] Before departing for his home in Adel, Vallabhacharya tells Damodardas: "There will still be a son, but he will be a *mlecch* ("a vile outsider" or "a non-believer")!"[55] When Damodardas' wife hears what has been prophesied, she stops performing *sevā* for fear that she will pollute Thakurji, and tells her mother: "if I do have such a son, take him away from me immediately. I never want to see his face!" At this point in the version of the *vārtā* that Raja is reading, the narrative pauses for Hariray's explanatory comment from the *Bhāvprakāś*, which states that: "there is no greater perversion than *anyāśray*. It is just like the woman who loses all her *dharma* by leaving her husband to be with another man."[56]

When Raja finishes reading, she indicates that the floor is open for commentary and discussion. An elderly woman named Surekha speaks up first:

> I don't even speak to anyone who isn't Vaishnava. When the woman comes for the trash, I leave it there and I don't even look at her. I buy my vegetables from a Vaishnava only. My husband goes to work for the entire day and I stay home, in *sevā*. I come here, to Raja's *satsaṅg*, but otherwise, I keep so few social relations. Now, imagine how Damodardas' wife must have been feeling—giving birth to a *mlecch*!

[54] It should be emphasized that the actions of Damodardas' wife are determined to result in *anyāśray* not because she consulted a fortune-teller as such, but rather because she consulted *any* person other than her own *guru*.

[55] The term *mlecch* is generally used in the *vārtā*s to refer to Muslim characters along with another term *yavan*, which can mean: "barbarian; non-Aryan; non-India"; "base; sinful; non-believing" (McGregor, *The Oxford Hindi-English Dictionary*, 839). In most instances the term *mlecch* is inherently pejorative, but not always to the same degree. Informants and contemporary translators have interpreted the word in several ways—sometimes glossing or replacing it with the more ambiguous *adharmī* ("immoral"), and sometimes even explicitly stating that the term does *not* refer to Muslims.

[56] Parīkh, *Coryāsī Vaiṣṇavan nī Vārtāo*, 333.

Around the room several people are shaking their heads and clicking their tongues in agreement, but most make faces of disapproval. "You surely have firm faith, Surekhaben," Raja says, "but your situation in life allows you to take so much time for your *sevā*….and one should perform *sevā* free from pride." Surekha fidgets in her chair. Raja smiles at Surekha and then indicates that another woman named Lila may have something to share with the group. Lila, a retired school-teacher, often confronts the sharp-tongued Surekha in weekly *satsaṅg*. Just as Kashmira emphasized in her commentary on the *vārtā* of Purushottamdas, Lila explains that she cannot comprehend how Vallabhacharya would endorse turning away family members—especially children. On the matter of *anyāśray* she states that indeed "Damodardas' wife had no reason to consult the fortune-teller." It was her *aparādh* ("transgression") to do so. Yet Lila goes on to explain that she does not endorse the kinds of exclusive sectarian behavior that prohibits interactions with "others." "I know I have firm faith," she says, "but this I cannot endure."

The issue of *anyāśray* comes up repeatedly in the *vārtā*s and is indeed portrayed as the most grave of transgressions. In his article, "The four *sampradāys*: ordering the religious past in Mughal North India," John Stratton Hawley addresses the relationship between Vallabhacharya's own writings on the matter of singular devotion and the *vārtā*s' emphasis on *anyāśray* as instruction that the *puṣṭimārgīy* devotee should seek spiritual *and* social guidance from his or her own *guru* only. "Vallabha himself had not used this term," writes Hawley:

> What he had done instead was to emphasize the importance of seeking refuge with Krishna alone since all other routes to salvation had been blocked by the

> magnitude of human sin. Vallabha's bloodline successors and those who surrounded them sectarianized this frame of reference. In their usage the term *anyāśraya* warned of the dangers of responding to the spiritual authority of anyone other than the leaders of the *vallabh kul* itself. We meet this notion often in the *vārtā* literature, which may already have germinated in the Vallabha community in the latter years of the sixteenth century, though the oldest *vārtā* texts to have come down to us belong to the seventeenth.[57]

While the *84VV* and *252VV* narratives do emphasize *anyāśray*, as Hawley notes, the more pointed emphasis is given by Hariray in his *Bhāvprakāś*, as in the example from Damodardas' *vārtā*.[58] Another example of Hariray's reference to *anyāśray* can be found in an episode from the narrative of Krishnadas Adhikari from the *84VV*. The episode tells of Krishnadas' encounter with the poet-saint Mirabai, a non-*puṣṭimārgīy* Vaishnava, who attempts to give an offering to Krishnadas for the Shrinathji deity. Krishnadas refuses on account that Mirabai is not a disciple of Vallabhacharya. Here, the concept *anyāśray* is extended to the deity's exclusive acceptance of offerings from those who have been initiated by a sectarian *guru*. The terms of *anyāśray*, which are connected to larger debates over what constitutes proper relationships between *guru*s and devotees, particularly in terms of devotees' financial support of their *guru*s (see Chapter Three), can be sensitive and contentious. Indeed, many contemporary *puṣṭimārgīy* devotees in Ahmedabad point out that the *vārtā*s' accounts of the concept are complex, difficult to comprehend, and sometimes even "spurious" with no grounding in Vallabhacharya's own writing. A member of the Vallabh Kul in Ahmedabad spoke very clearly on the matter (although he wished that his name not be mentioned in relation to this topic): "to be very

[57] Hawley, "The four *sampradāys*," 169.

[58] The dangers of *anyāśray* are also highlighted in Hariray's *Śikṣāpatra*—a text to which he also refers in his commentary on the *vārtā*s.

frank, we cannot even say with full certainty that what we see as the *Bhāvprakāś* is actually the work of Shri Harirayji. Things could have been added on later, and changed to make a point." In reality, the *gosvāmī* continues, "it [the concept of *anyāśrāy*] becomes a stress for Vaishnavas to argue about. But they do, and regardless of what we [in the Vallabha Kul] say on the matter it will be debated. They want to know what is right—do this not that. But it is not always so clear and there are disagreements, which according to me, is inevitable."[59]

Lila's commentary on *anyāśrāy* in the *vārtā* of Damodardas reflects her own life situation. In a private interview, Lila explained her particular familial circumstances. Like Dipa from Kashmira's *satsaṅg*, Lila struggles with family members who are not adherents of the Vallabha Sampraday. Her one son, who lives in Florida, is not only openly apathetic about sectarian observances, but is also married to a German woman who, as Lila explains, "understands nothing about Indian culture, let alone *sevā* and Thakurji. She also eats meat in the house and feeds it to the kids. It's a difficult thing for me and it gives me sorrow." Regardless, Lila has a close relationship with family: "It's my task to bear the burden, not theirs," she explains. "But the problem is this: when I go to Florida to visit them how can I bring Thakurji?" Instead of bringing her *svarūp* with her when she travels to visit family in the United States, as many Gujarat-based devotees frequently do, Lila entrusts a close friend to care for the deity. "Shoba takes Thakurji

[59] This topic comes up frequently, both in *vārtā* reading groups and in casual conversation. The most common questions regarding *anyāśray* are: "can I take the *prasād* of other deities?" and "can I go into temples that do not belong to the Vallabh Sampraday and take *darśan* of other deities?" There are multiple ways that devotees and religious leaders answer these questions and others like it.

when I'm in Jacksonville, but allows me to sing to him on the phone each night. In Ahmedabad it's morning and he's just waking up." Lila's sentiment beautifully expresses the devotion she has for her *svarūp* as well as her ability to effectively negotiate between satisfying both familial commitments and what she considers to be her devotional commitments as Thakurji's caretaker. This is yet another example of how devotees, just as the characters from the *vārtā*s, strive to balance between sectarian principles and familial commitments.

Lila's personal account and the exchanges from Raja's *satsaṅg* further highlight the distinct ways in which *vārtā* readings function. As we observed in the example from Kashmira's group, reading the hagiographies provides a platform for the intimate sharing of devotees' everyday experiences and the ways in which these experiences follow or challenge certain models for sectarian thought and practice. The example of Raja's group also indicates that devotees do not necessarily have predictable or uniformly shared reactions to the *vārtā*s. Rather, readers are actively engaged in negotiating between what the narratives are perceived to teach and their individual interpretations. This type of engagement is in fact a logical extension of Hariray's *Bhāvprakāś* and of modern written commentaries: just as commentaries raise doubts and gloss the actions of *vārtā* characters in terms of *siddhānt*, contemporary readers also entertain questions during *satsaṅg*—not only questions about the *vārtā*s themselves, but also questions that challenge interpretations heard from fellow devotees and established authorities.

II c. *Aparas* ("ritual purity")

Raja Betiji's nephew, Madhusudanlal, or Tilak Goswami as he is more commonly called, is the eldest son of Vrajnath Maharaj, the current leader (*mahārāj*) of the Goswami Haveli temple. Unlike many other members of the Vallabh Kul who no longer live permanently at their family's heritage temples, Tilak Goswami—along with his parents, wife, two young sons, and younger brother—lives year-round at the Goswami Haveli. The temple, which houses two Krishna *svarūp*s (Natvarlalji and Shyamlalji), is one of the oldest *puṣṭimārgīy havelī*s in Ahmedabad city. The Natvarlalji and Shyamlalji deities, along with their caretakers who hail from a branch of the First House, moved first from the Rajasthani city of Kota to Jodhpur during the early eighteenth century, and then from Jodhpur to Ahmedabad in the early nineteenth century.

Like all male members of the Vallabh Kul, Tilak Goswami is expected to perform *sevā* for his temple's *svarūp*s and to perform various duties associated with being a *guru* in the *sampradāy*. Among many things, this includes initiating new members into the sect, providing spiritual guidance to his followers, writing his own theological commentaries and giving *pravacan*, and orchestrating seasonal religious and social events at the Goswami Haveli.[60] Tilak Goswami, now in his early thirties and a father of two young boys, does indeed strive to do all of this and, from the community's perspective, does it quite well. He is loved and respected by his devotees who openly

[60] As previously discussed, it is now infrequent that members of the Vallabh Kul live with the original *svarūp*s that have been passed down in their particular lineages of the *sampradāy*. For instance, Vrajeshkumar Maharaj, the current *mahārāj* of the Third House, keeps his permanent residence in Baroda, Gujarat, while the Dwarkadhish *svarūp* (also known as Dwarkanathji) is housed in Kankroli, Rajasthan and cared for by temple *sevak*s. Vrajeshkumar does, however, visit Kankroli regularly, where he and his sons perform *sevā* during major seasonal festivals.

compare him to his grandfather, Vrajrai Maharaj III, as a powerful and dynamic personality.[61] It was his grandfather, Tilak Goswami shared with me, who inspired him to lead his own *vārtā* readings each Sunday at the Goswami Haveli. These readings normally attract fifty to one hundred participants (men, women, and children), who join together after taking *darśan* of Natvarlalji and Shyamlalji.

Just as we saw in the example of Raja Betiji's *satsaṅg*, debating interpretations of the *vārtā*s is also a common feature of Tilak Goswami's gatherings. One such debate during a winter meeting at the Goswami Haveli in 2012 arose over the issue of *aparas* ("ritual purity") during *sevā*. *Aparas*, like the issue of *anyāśrāy*, is a highly debated topic among contemporary devotees—specifically among those who actively participate in Thakurji's *sevā*. The matter is addressed in the *vārtā*s, in other sectarian literature, such as Hariray's *Śikṣāpatra*, and also in countless contemporary *sevā* "manuals."[62] Put simply, *aparas* refers to a ritual state that begins after a ritual practitioner has bathed and changed his or her clothing in preparation for *sevā*. Once in this state, the ritual practitioner and his or her clothing must remain untouched (and even unseen and "un-smelled") by any polluting substances, objects, or people, until the performance of *sevā* is complete. For devotees who perform *sevā* during all of the eight prescribed times of day, this can require many changes of clothing as he or she comes in and out of *sevā* and other daily chores and work.

[61] Tilak Goswami and his own youngest son also share the identical birth date with Vrajrai Maharaj, which further enhances the comparison.

[62] For example, see: Śarmā, *Śrī Vallabhīy Puṣṭi Sevā*, 41.

The debate over *aparas* that took place during *satsaṅg* at the Goswami Haveli was triggered by the reading of an account about a devotee named Virbai from the *84VV*. Here is a summary of the episode that Tilak Goswami read aloud:

> When Virbai gave birth to a son she was distressed because, due to her impure state, she could not perform *sevā*. "Who will awaken Shri Thakurji?" she thought to herself. After several days she began to cry over the matter and felt great *viraha* ("the anguish of separation" from Krishna): "What shall I do?!" Then Shri Thakurji spoke to her: "What does it matter if there isn't anyone else to wake me, you alone should wake me!" Surprised, Virbai replied: "My Lord! I've fallen into *aghor narak* ("a fearsome hell"), how can I touch you? Then Shri Thakurji told Virbai that she could return to *sevā*: "bathe and put on fresh garments (*kāch*). I will not have anyone else perform my *sevā*. This is my order, there will be no *aparādh* ("transgression")." [63]

After reading the episode, Tilak Goswami begins by offering a simple gloss: "Our Virbai was such a dedicated devotee…that Shri Thakurji said, 'don't cry like this, perform my *sevā*. It is no transgression'." However, Tilak Goswami quickly goes on to comment further on the broader theme of ritual purity and the ways in which devotees should dress when performing *sevā*. "See, Shri Thakurji told Virbai: wear your *kāch*, that is, *sāṛī*.[64] Today the situation is such that so many ladies are wearing…what do you say, those things called "maxi" [a woman's nightgown]. They don't put on the *sāṛī* and according to me…this is not right." At this point Tilak Goswami's wife, Vrajbhamini

[63] Tilak Goswami reads from: Parīkh, *Caurāsī Vaiṣṇavan kī Vārtā* (2011), 339-344. It should be noted that Tilak Goswami always reads from Braj Bhasha versions of the *vārtā*s. The following discussion is primarily in Gujarati, but Tilak Goswami and others also occasionally lapse into Hindi. Both Hindi and Gujarati are used in Tilak Goswami's household, as his mother and his wife are native Hindi speakers who moved to Gujarat after marriage. Most living members of the Vallabh Kul speak both Hindi and Gujarati.

[64] The word *kāch* is defined as: "*dhotī*, esp. the end of the *dhotī* tucked in at the waist behind" (McGregor, *The Oxford Hindi-English Dictionary*, 186). Sumit Sharma confirmed that here *kāch* refers to a *sāṛī* tied in a "*dhotī* style" as per the above definition (Personal Communication, March 31st, 2012).

Bahuji, who often joins her husband for *vārtā* readings, interjects: "But isn't it okay if the maxi that a lady uses is *only* used during *sevā*?" Vrajbhamini Bahuji goes on to explain that many women tell her that they prefer such maxi garments to the *sāṛī* even while observing all normative measures of ritual purity. "Because of this," she continues, "I tell them that it is acceptable." Tilak Goswami grimaces: "a *sevā* maxi!" The discussion soon spreads into the crowd of nearly seventy devotees:

"Of course ladies must wear a *sāṛī* in *sevā*—we can't be so lazy!"

"If ladies wear *sāṛī* then men must wear *dhotī*s!"

"My daughter doesn't even know how to tie a *sāṛī* —let alone do *sevā*!"

While the issue of how to properly perform and prepare oneself for *sevā* is a sincere and serious matter, the debate sparked by Virbai's *vārtā* is also light-hearted and filled with laughter. One teenage boy makes a face like Tilak Goswami and repeats his *guru*'s complaint: "*sevā* maxi!" and then bursts into laughter. The laughter and discussion is finally brought to a close and Tilak Goswami returns to the reading—but not before he and his wife come to the conclusion that the appropriate clothing to wear in *sevā* depends on the devotee's individual relationship with his or her *guru* and with Thakurji.

The element of humor, just as it arose during the Virbai discussion, often finds its way into *vārtā satsaṅg*—particularly when devotees draw attention to seeming incongruence between elements of modern life and the ritual practice of *sevā*.[65] Much like the debate over whether or not to feed Thakurji pizza, the debate about sartorial

[65] While not in the Virbai episode, the *vārtā* narratives themselves have a fair amount of intentionally humorous episodes. For further on the function of humor in Hindu religious narratives and in South Asian religions more broadly, see: Raj, Selva J. and Corinne G. Dempsey, *Ritual Levity and Humor in South Asian Religions*.

propriety during *sevā* yet again points to the kinds of questioning that occurs when devotees discuss the relationship between textual models and real-life practices. Humor during *satsaṅg*, I suggest, reveals a certain sense of intimacy between devotees and their religious leaders and also helps to facilitate the kinds of questions and negotiations that are so integral to *vārtā* readings.

In conversations about the key features of *vārtā* reading groups, both devotees and members of the Vallabh Kul expressed the view that questioning texts is key to religious learning and to the cultivation of *bhāv*, *vaiṣṇavtā*, etc. As Shyam Manohar Goswami, whom we encountered in Chapter Three, expressed during a *pravacan*: "What is the use of being like a bird in a cage? One has to leave that cage and engage in discussion—this is how you learn."[66] Similarly, Tilak Goswami told me: "we [members of the Vallabh Kul] should also emphasize the importance of reading and learning in this way. If you seek to know more and strengthen your *bhāv*, then it is okay to even have religious debate with your *guru*. These are positive Vaishnava qualities…we can see such behavior modeled by characters from both the *84VV* and *252VV*." [67]

In this section we have considered three overlapping themes that occur repeatedly during *satsaṅg* meetings: 1) the matter of harmonizing *sevā, satsaṅg,* and *laukik*, namely

[66] Shyam Manohar Goswami, Mumbai, February, 2013. "Upkaram 1." Accessed March 1st, 2013. http://72.167.35.235/ongoing/fal_seminar_2013/01_upkaram/.

[67] Personal Communication, February 21st, 2012. There are countless examples of such debates in the *vārtā*s. A fine example appears in the two hundred and twenty-third *vārtā* of the *252VV* in which an elderly woman who believes that all Krishna *svarūp*s should look identical argues with a fellow devotee that his *svarūp* (who is physically distinct from her own) is deformed. In his *Bhāvprakāś* comments in this *vārtā*, Hariray writes that: "God (*prabhu*) is pleased when Vaishnavas quarrel with each other. When such quarrels occur, grace (*kṛpā*) is realized" (Parīkh, *Do Sau Bāvan Vaiṣṇavan kī Vārtā*, 238).

familial, obligations; 2) the matter of *anyāśray*, or "taking refuge in another," and how this influences devotees' interactions with fellow devotees and non-*puṣṭimārgīy* family members and; 3) the matter of *aparas*, or ritual purity during *sevā*. More than the themes discussed, however, the ways in which negotiations are made during group readings point to the special role that *vārtā satsaṅg*s have in structuring the lives of members of the Vallabh Sampraday.

Conclusion: Religious Reading and Religious Readers

In this chapter I set out to make sense of how contemporary readers of the *vārtā*s in Ahmedabad city imagine and express their individual social and devotional worlds through the performative practices of group reading and how, through these practices, *puṣṭimārgīy* identities are articulated and relationships are maintained. What my three case studies suggest is that the *vārtā* narratives, as well as the contexts in which they are read, trigger devotees to share individual accounts and to actively debate perceived ideals in terms of personal convictions. Beyond the themes and details of these negotiations, the very structures and features of *vārtā satsaṅg*s ask us to reconsider the ways in which religious reading functions as a distinct practice. As for the modeling of behavior, that seems to be the particular province of hagiography.

In his seminal book *The Final Word: The* Caitanya Caritāmṛta *and the Grammar of Religious Tradition*, Tony K. Stewart writes that hagiographies do more than interact with other texts: they "also depend on and interact with the cultural texts that constitute

the rules of social conduct, logical argument, systematic theology, ritual practice."[68] Further, he suggests, the act of composing hagiography is a "religious act." When the author of a hagiography indicates that he has written about his *guru*—or of lauded devotees—we should accept that this statement is reflective of the author's own experiences. In this way, the "history" that such texts proclaim is not so much that of the *guru*, but "that of the religious imagination of the community gathered around him."[69] While the case studies presented here focused on the connection that hagiographies have to contemporary life experiences rather than on the aspects of hagiography that fundamentally relate to history and memory, Stewart's comment on the religious imagination represented by sacred biography is key to understanding the institution of *vārtā satsaṅg*. If writing a hagiography is a religious act, then clearly reading and discussing one is as well. This practice is not only visible in the contemporary context; it can also be internal to hagiographic texts themselves. In both the *Caritāmṛta* and the *84VV* and *252VV* (and in other *vārtā* texts) we see images of *satsaṅg*—of devotional performance, group reading and discussion—as a practice that both confirms and recreates religious imagination.

Paul Griffiths has suggested that reading "religiously" shapes one's role as an interpreter, and that the primary aim of religious readers is to "come closer to texts"—even if by challenging and questioning them.[70] Linda Hess, in her work on the practice of

[68] Stewart, *The Final Word*, 15.

[69] Stewart, *The Final Word*, 16.

[70] Griffiths, *Religious Reading*, 42-43.

devotees' expression of doubts (*śaṅkā*) about Tulsidas' *Rāmāyaṇ*, eloquently describes this aspect of religious reading:

> The questioning process is not just a means of getting answers. Those who question are already assumed to be lovers [of the *Rāmāyaṇ*], and the process enacts the love that exists. It is a way of lingering in the text, enjoying *satsang*, savoring the endless possibilities of wisdom and pleasure that text and community afford.[71]

The context of *vārtā satsaṅg* similarly reminds us of these distinct features of religious reading. Here reading is inherently a collective and performative act that inspires group dialogue and debate. This way of reading is also, as we saw repeatedly in this chapter, a natural extension of the *vārtā* genre itself. This reinforces my argument from Chapter One that the *84VV* and *252VV*, along with Hariray's *Bhāvprakāś* commentaries, are inherently dialogic texts, which themselves seek to interpret and validate sectarian doctrine through narrative examples of devotees' lives. While social circumstances have changed, this is precisely what contemporary devotees continue to do today.

Further, as *vārtā* readers repeatedly pointed out, *satsaṅg* provides a space in which to cultivate *bhāv*, or the "devotional mood" which allows people to strengthen their relationships with one another and with Thakurji. This network of relationships, as Robert Orsi has argued, is in fact a defining feature of any religious tradition. Religion, Orsi writes, is not only a "medium for explaining, understanding, and modeling reality," it is also a "network of relationships between heaven and earth involving humans of all

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[71] Linda Hess, "Lovers' Doubts: Questioning the Tulsi *Rāmāyaṇ*," in *Questioning Ramayanas: A South Asian Tradition*, edited by Paula Richman (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 28.

ages and many different sacred figures together." These relationships have "all the complexities—all the hopes, evasions, love, fear, denial, projections, misunderstandings, and so on—of relationships between humans."[72] Above all else, I argue, the hagiographies offer a template for discussing, negotiating, and strengthening these complex relationships.

The context of *vārtā satsaṅg* has shown, then, that religious readers not only read with the ambition to "come closer to texts," as Griffiths suggests, but also with the ambition to become hagiographers in their own right—retelling and questioning well-known narratives in light of everyday experiences and personal convictions. While textual prescriptions and religious leaders continue to assert authority, *vārtā* readings demonstrate that negotiations of normative behavior are fluid—situated in particular socio-historical moments and influenced by intersubjective relationships, both human and divine.

[72] Orsi, *Between Heaven and Earth*, 2.

Conclusion: Reading the Medieval in the Modern

> Nothing is more commonplace than the experience of reading, and nothing is more unknown. Reading is taken for granted to such an extent that at first glance it seems nothing need be said about it.[1]
>
> -Tzevtan Todorov

The goal of this dissertation has been to use textual and ethnographic archives to highlight significant moments and spaces in which the *vārtā* hagiographies of the Vallabh Sampraday have continued to inspire modern audiences. In so doing, I have followed the *vārtā*s' transformation from Braj Bhasha manuscripts to modern Gujarati books, and have considered the reception of these texts through written and oral commentaries across time and in multiple spaces—including courtrooms, sectarian temples, devotees' private homes, print publications, and Internet discussion forums. By tracing how the *vārtā*s have been received over time, I have shown that practices of religious reading are intimately tied to the cultivation of devotional affect, negotiations between precept and practice, relationship building, and sectarian identity construction.

In Chapter One I laid the foundation for the following three chapters by approaching *Vārtā Sāhitya* in terms of the genre's own unique literary ecology. Specifically, I highlighted the ways in which the *Caurāsī Vaiṣṇavan kī Vārtā* and *Do Sau Bāvan Vaiṣṇavan kī Vārtā*, along with their *Bhāvprakāś* commentaries, are intertextual and dialogic texts, which inspire readers to discuss and debate the narratives as negotiable grammars of tradition. Chapter Two described one of the most pivotal moments in the

[1] Tzvetan Todorov, *Genres in Discourse*, translated by Catherine Porter (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 151.

modern history of the Vallabh Sampraday—the late nineteenth century. I showed how the *vārtā* hagiographies were key to both insiders' and outsiders' articulations of *puṣṭimārgīy* identity in the face of broader debates over what constituted so-called authentic Hinduism during the period. In the final portion of the chapter I showed how modern publications of and written commentaries on the *vārtā*s aimed to culturally re-authorize the texts as historically and theologically accurate representations of the Vallabh Sampraday as an "authentic" Hindu sect.

Chapters Three and Four focused on the performative practices of religious reading in the contemporary context. In Chapter Three I considered both written and oral forms of discourse on the *vārtā*s with respect to major community debates over *sevā* and the use of temple spaces. These debates, I suggested, reveal the dynamic and plural ways in which modern readers interpret and use premodern scripture to different ends. More broadly, this chapter brought up the importance of considering continuities and changes in practices of scriptural interpretation, and argued that both oral and written forms of commentary on physical texts point to the organic ways in which texts, and indeed religion itself, are understood and affected according to readers' reception and socio-historical contexts. This is not to say that interpretations or expressions of *puṣṭimārgīy* texts are random or unpredictable. Discourse on the *vārtā*s is formulated and enlivened through specific conventions of reading, debate, and dialogue that have roots in the *vārtā* narratives—themselves texts based on an oral tradition of storytelling and discussion. This continuity of reading practices was most clearly discussed in Chapter Four, where I showed how contemporary devotees use the ritual context of *satsaṅg* to negotiate

between sectarian teachings inherited from the past and everyday ritual and ethical dilemmas of the present. Moreover, I argued, practices of religious reading in *satsaṅg* are directly tied to the cultivation and maintenance of intimate relationships between fellow devotees and between devotees and Thakurji.

My intention in the preceding pages has been to demonstrate that the *vārtā*s have served as a continuous forum in which worldly and spiritual matters are allowed to co-exist within individual lives. Throughout all four chapters I have pointed to the ways in which the *vārtā*s provide readers with a synthesis of sectarian history and a blueprint of social and devotional practice, but also how the texts inspire ongoing discussion, commentary, and debate. The *vārtā*s, I have argued, are negotiable grammars of tradition. By studying various practices of religious reading over time, I have shown that the interpretation of premodern sacred texts depends both on those texts' literary aesthetics, but also on the historically and socially located commitments and imaginations of those texts' readers.

This assertion—that premodern scripture should be approached both in terms of its aesthetic features and in terms of its reception by readers—has required that I cut across disciplinary boundaries. In this dissertation I have relied both on ethnographic encounters and also on archival research and textual analysis. While divisions between historical, literary, and ethnographic approaches to religion and religious texts have long-since been challenged by scholars like Robert Orsi and David Haberman, specific interest in studying the ways in which predmodern scriptures, specifically hagiographies, continue to be read and interpreted by modern readers has only recently become an area

of interest in the field of South Asian religions.[2] This dissertation contributes to this new site of inquiry into modern practices of religious reading in South Asia by bringing together ethnographic accounts of lived contexts and highlighting texts and commentaries that have travelled across time and regions.

As narratives from the *Caurāsī Vaiṣṇavan kī Vārtā* and *Do Sau Bāvan Vaiṣṇavan kī Vārtā* formulaically conclude—what more can be said? The *vārtā* tradition is diverse, complex, and emergent—a telling of it can have no end.

[2] See, for example: Hyder, *Reliving Karbala* (2008); Novetzke, *Religion and Public Memory* (2009).

Appendix:

What follows are two translations of complete *vārtā*s from the *84VV*. These should serve as examples of the general structure of the narratives as they appear in most versions of the *84VV* and *252VV* that contain Hariray's *Bhāvprakāś* commentaries. These particular narratives are rather average in length and likewise have an average number of *prasaṅg*s ("episodes"). Preceding the translations I have included sample images of the Braj Bhasha *vārtā*s from Parikh's 2011 version of the *84VV*.[1]

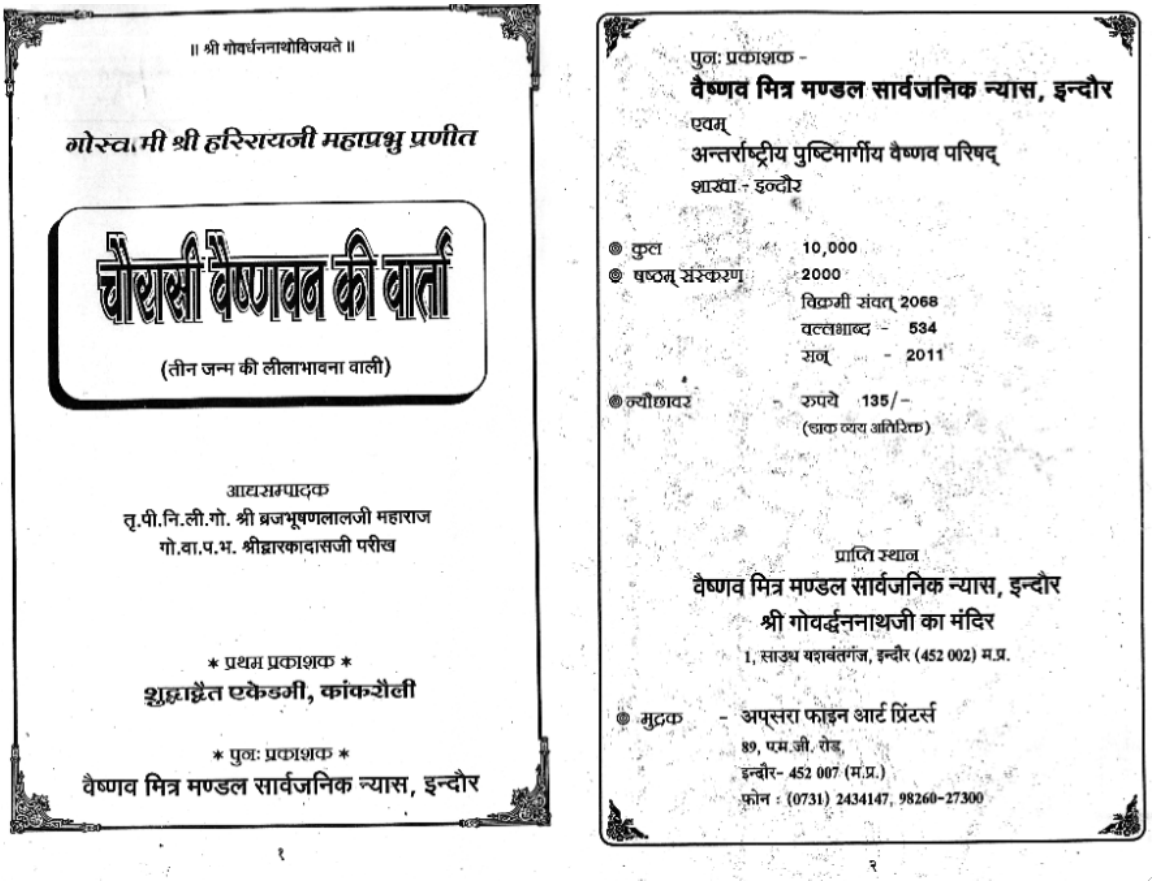
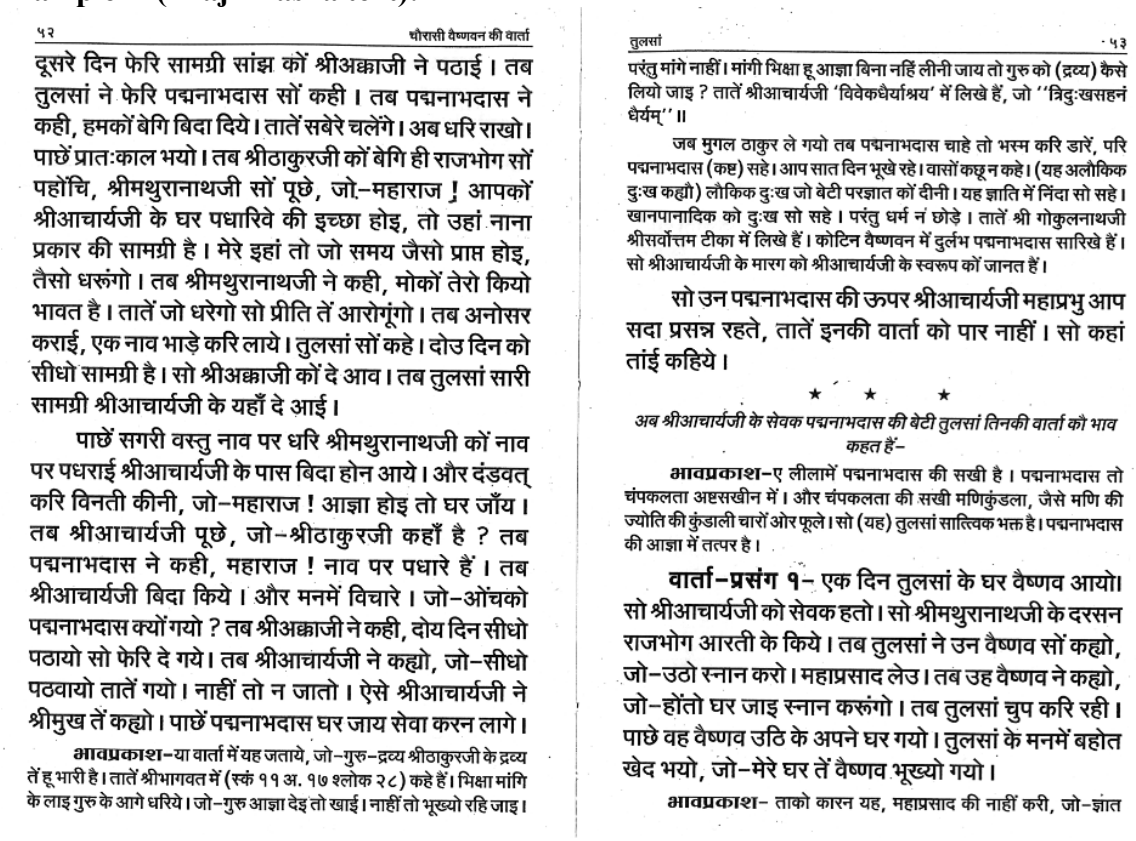


Image of title page (Parīkh, *Caurāsī Vaiṣṇavan kī Vārtā* (2011), 1-2).

[1] Parīkh, *Caurāsī Vaiṣṇavan kī Vārtā* (2011), 53-58 (for example A); 150-154 (for example B).

Example A (Braj Bhasha text):



५२ चौरासी वैष्णवन की वार्ता

दूसरे दिन फेरि सामग्री सांझ कों श्रीअक्काजी ने पठाई। तब तुलसां ने फेरि पद्मनाभदास सों कही। तब पद्मनाभदास ने कही, हमकों बेगि बिदा दिये। तातें सबेरे चलेंगे। अब धरि राखो। पाछें प्रातःकाल भयो। तब श्रीठाकुरजी कों बेगि ही राजभोग सों पहोंचि, श्रीमथुरानाथजी सों पूछे, जो–महाराज ! आपकों श्रीआचार्यजी के घर पधारिवे की इच्छा होइ, तो उहां नाना प्रकार की सामग्री है। मेरे इहां तो जो समय जैसो प्राप्त होइ, तैसो धरूंगो। तब श्रीमथुरानाथजी ने कही, मोकों तेरो कियो भावत है। तातें जो धरेगो सो प्रीति तें आरोगूंगो। तब अनोसर कराई, एक नाव भाड़े करि लाये। तुलसां सों कहे। दोउ दिन को सीधो सामग्री है। सो श्रीअक्काजी कों दे आव। तब तुलसां सारी सामग्री श्रीआचार्यजी के यहाँ दे आई।

पाछें सगरी वस्तु नाव पर धरि श्रीमथुरानाथजी कों नाव पर पधराई श्रीआचार्यजी के पास बिदा होन आये। और दंडवत् करि विनती कीनी, जो–महाराज ! आज्ञा होइ तो घर जाँय। तब श्रीआचार्यजी पूछे, जो–श्रीठाकुरजी कहाँ है ? तब पद्मनाभदास ने कही, महाराज ! नाव पर पधारे हैं। तब श्रीआचार्यजी बिदा किये। और मनमें विचारे। जो–ओंचको पद्मनाभदास क्यों गयो ? तब श्रीअक्काजी ने कही, दोय दिन सीधो पठायो सो फेरि दे गये। तब श्रीआचार्यजी ने कह्यो, जो–सीधो पठवायो तातें गयो। नाहीं तो न जातो। ऐसे श्रीआचार्यजी ने श्रीमुख तें कह्यो। पाछें पद्मनाभदास घर जाय सेवा करन लागे।

भावप्रकाश–या वार्ता में यह जताये, जो–गुरु–द्रव्य श्रीठाकुरजी के द्रव्य तें हू भारी है। तातें श्रीभागवत में (स्कं ११ अ. १७ श्लोक २८) कहे हैं। भिक्षा मांगि के लाइ गुरु के आगे धरिये। जो–गुरु आज्ञा देइ तो खाई। नाहीं तो भूख्यो रहि जाइ।

तुलसां ५३

परंतु मांगे नाहीं। मांगी भिक्षा हू आज्ञा बिना नहिं लीनी जाय तो गुरु को (द्रव्य) कैसे लियो जाइ ? तातें श्रीआचार्यजी 'विवेकधैर्याश्रय' में लिखे हैं, जो ''त्रिदुःखसहनं धैर्यम्''॥

जब मुगल ठाकुर ले गयो तब पद्मनाभदास चाहे तो भस्म करि डारें, परि पद्मनाभदास (कष्ट) सहे। आप सात दिन भूखे रहे। वासों कछू न कहे। (यह अलौकिक दुःख कह्यौ) लौकिक दुःख जो बेटी परज्ञात कों दीनी। यह ज्ञाति में निंदा सो सहे। खानपानादिक को दुःख सो सहे। परंतु धर्म नं छोड़े। तातें श्री गोकुलनाथजी श्रीसर्वोत्तम टीका में लिखे हैं। कोटिन वैष्णवन में दुर्लभ पद्मनाभदास सारिखे हैं। सो श्रीआचार्यजी के मारग को श्रीआचार्यजी के स्वरूप कों जानत हैं।

सो उन पद्मनाभदास की ऊपर श्रीआचार्यजी महाप्रभु आप सदा प्रसन्न रहते, तातें इनकी वार्ता को पार नाहीं। सो कहां तांई कहिये।

★ ★ ★

अब श्रीआचार्यजी के सेवक पद्मनाभदास की बेटी तुलसां तिनकी वार्ता कौ भाव कहत हैं–

भावप्रकाश–ए लीलामें पद्मनाभदास की सखी है। पद्मनाभदास तो चंपकलता अष्टसखीन में। और चंपकलता की सखी मणिकुंडला, जैसे मणि की ज्योति की कुंडाली चारों ओर फूले। सो (यह) तुलसां सात्त्विक भक्त है। पद्मनाभदास की आज्ञा में तत्पर है।

वार्ता–प्रसंग १– एक दिन तुलसां के घर वैष्णव आयो। सो श्रीआचार्यजी को सेवक हतो। सो श्रीमथुरानाथजी के दरसन राजभोग आरती के किये। तब तुलसां ने उन वैष्णव सों कह्यो, जो–उठो स्नान करो। महाप्रसाद लेउ। तब उह वैष्णव ने कह्यो, जो–होंतो घर जाइ स्नान करूंगो। तब तुलसां चुप करि रही। पाछे वह वैष्णव उठि के अपने घर गयो। तुलसां के मनमें बहोत खेद भयो, जो–मेरे घर तें वैष्णव भूख्यो गयो।

भावप्रकाश– ताको कारन यह, महाप्रसाद की नाहीं करी, जो–ज्ञात

Image of Braj Bhasha text (Parīkh, *Caurāsī Vaiṣṇavan kī Vārtā* (2011), 52-53).

व्यौहार के लिये लियो नाहीं। सो तुलसां समझ गई। तातें आग्रह नाहीं कियो। यह गौड ब्राह्मन हतो और लीला में ललिताजी की सखी है। सौरभा इनको नाम है। इनके अंगतें अतर गुलाब की सुगंध आवती। यह वैष्णव ललिताजी की सखी है। और तुलसां चंपकलता की सखी है। और तुलसां के बस श्रीमथुरानाथजी है। तातें यह वैष्णव नें महाप्रसाद न लियो। जो–ललिताजी की आज्ञा बिना कैसें लेउ ? तातें यह वैष्णव अपने घर चल्यो गयो। तब तुलसां के मनमें खेद भयो।

तब मनमें आई जो–ज्ञाति व्यौहार के लिये सखड़ी न लीनी होइगी। तो भलो, परि सबेरे पूरी प्रसाद लिवाऊंगी। पाछे मैंदा छानि सिद्ध करि राख्यो। पाछे सोइ रही। ता दिन तुलसां ने महाप्रसाद नाहीं लियो। पाछे रात्रिकों श्रीमथुरानाथजी ने तुलसां सों स्वप्न में कह्यो, जो–सवारे वा वैष्णव कों महाप्रसाद लिवाइयो। वह वैष्णव अपने घर महाप्रसाद न लेइगो।

भावप्रकाश–यामें यह जताए, जो–काल्हि उह वैष्णव महाप्रसाद लेइगो। तू चिंता मति करे। पाछें श्रीठाकुरजी नें उह वैष्णव कों जताये, जो–तुलसां के इहां महाप्रसाद क्यों न लियो? सबेरे लीजियो। ललिताजी की हू आज्ञा है। सो ललिताजी हू कहे। तुलसां के इहां महाप्रसाद लीजो। हमारे उनके भाव में भेद नाहीं।

वार्ता–प्रसंग २–पाछे प्रातःकाल तुलसां ने पूरी करी। श्रीठाकुरजी कूं जगाये। सेवा सिंगार करन लागी। इतने ही में उह वैष्णव सवारे नहाय के श्रीठाकुरजी की सेवासों पहोंचि तुलसां के घर आयो। जब तुलसां भोग समर्पि के बाहर आई। तब वा वैष्णव सों जयश्रीकृष्ण कियो। और तुलसां ने कह्यो, जो–उठो स्नान करो, भगवद्स्मरण करो। तब वा वैष्णव ने कही, मैं स्नान करि अपरसही में आयो हूँ। (तथा कहुं वार्ता में यहू है, जो–स्नान करि तिलक मुद्रा करि भगवद्स्मरण कियो)। समय भये तुलसां ने राजभोग सरायौ, आरती करी। वैष्णव ने दरसन कियो। पाछे तुलसां श्रीठाकुरजी कों अनोसर करि बाहर आई।

और वा वैष्णव कों प्रसाद की पातर धरी। तामें पूरी, बूरा, दहीथरा, संधानो धर्यो। और कह्यो, जो–प्रसाद लेउ। तब वा वैष्णव ने कही, जो–यह नाहीं लेउंगो। सखड़ी महाप्रसाद धरो, लेऊंगो। तब तुलसां ने कह्यो, कछू संकोच मति करो, यह तो ज्ञाति को व्यौहार है। तब वैष्णव ने कह्यो, जो–सो तो साँच। पहले तो मेरे मन में ऐसी ही। परि अब तो आज्ञा भई है। तातें अब तो सखड़ी महाप्रसाद लेउंगो। तब तुलसां (ने) सखड़ी, अनसखड़ी दोऊ धरी, वैष्णव के आगे। पाछे वा वैष्णव ने सखड़ी प्रसाद लियो। प्रसाद ले वह वैष्णव अपने घर गयो। तब तुलसां मनमें बहोत प्रसन्न भई।

भावप्रकाश–यामें यह जताये। वैष्णव घर आवे तिनको यथाशक्ति सन्मान करनो। काहेते ? श्रीभागवत में कहे हैं, जा घर में जलादिकनको हू सन्मान नाहीं है, वाको घर सर्प को घर बिला सो जाननो। सो तुलसां को वैष्णव पर ऐसो ममत्व हतो।

वार्ता–प्रसंग ३– बहुरि एक समें तुलसां के घर गुसांईजी पधारे। तब तुलसां ने बहुत भली भांति सों सेवा कीनी। श्रीठाकुरजी तें अधिक जानि के सेवा कीनी। तब श्रीगुसांईजी बहुत प्रसन्न भये। और एक दिन श्रीगुसांईजी भोजन करि के पौढ़े हते। तुलसां भगवद्वार्ता करि श्रीगुसांईजी कों प्रसन्न किये। तब तुलसां सों अति प्रसन्नता में भगवद्वार्ता करत में श्रीगुसांईजी ने श्रीमुख सों कह्यो, जो–पद्मनाभदास की संतति ऐसी ही चाहिये।

भावप्रकाश–याको अर्थ यह, जो–लीला में सखी है, ऐसी क्यों न होई ? तहां श्रीगुसांईजी चंद्रावलीजी रूप हैं। सो इनको परकीया भाव श्रीठाकुरजी सों है। तातें हास्य बहोत प्रिय है। सो कटाक्ष के वचन पूछे, जो–श्रीठाकुरजी अपने स्वरूपानंद को अनुभव जतावत हैं ? तुम हू तो सखी हो। श्रीठाकुरजी की सेवा करि के बस किये

Image of Braj Bhasha text (Parīkh, *Caurāsī Vaiṣṇavan kī Vārtā* (2011), 54-55).

हो। तातें हमारे साझे में तुमहू हो। या प्रकार व्यंग के वचन कहे। परंतु तुलसां सुद्ध सात्विक है। इनकों कटाक्ष बहोत नाहीं है। सुधी है।

पाछें श्रीगुसांईजी ने तुलसां सों पूछी, जो–श्रीठाकुरजी सानुभावता जतावत हैं ? तब तुलसां ने कह्यो, जो–महाराज ! अब तो (हम) पेट भरि खइयत है और नींद भरि सोइयत हैं। परि श्रीआचार्यजी के ग्रन्थ को पाठ नित्य करियत हैं। तब श्रीगुसांईजी बहोत प्रसन्न भये।

भावप्रकाश–पेट भरिके खइयत हैं। नींद भरिके सोइयत हैं। सो यह, जो–जितनो रस हमारे पेट में समात है, जैसें हम पात्र हैं, तितनो श्रीठाकुरजी अनुभव जतावत हैं। तातें श्रीठाकुरजी की संग नींद भरि सोइयत हैं। काहेतें, हमारो स्वकीया भाव है। तातें सुखी हैं। चिंता नाहीं है। मुख्य अर्थ यह। और गुरु भाव सों यह अर्थ, जो–महाराज ! हम अनेक जन्म श्रीठाकुरजी सों विछुरिके पायो। परंतु काहू योनि में पेट नहीं भर्यो। और सुख सों नींद नाहीं आई। अब आपु कृपा करिके सरन लिये। सो अबके जनम में पेट हू भर्यो। और श्रीठाकुरजी को एक आश्रय करिके सोये हू। सगरे जनम अविद्या करि दुःख में बिताये। एक अर्थ यह।

और दैन्य पक्ष में यह, जो–हमकों कहा अनुभव करावें? पेट भरि के खइयत हैं। नींद भरिके सोइयत हैं। जैसे पसु कों खाइबे को और सोइबे को काम। और काम परबसतें कोई लादे, जो–मारे तब करे। तैसे हमहू प्रीति खानपान में है। सेवा लोगन की निंदा भये तें है, जो–बड़े पद्मनाभदास की संतति, सेवा नाहीं करत। या प्रकार लोगन की प्रतिष्ठा अर्थ। तातें हमकों कहा अनुभव जतावें ? सूरदासजी नें गायो है। ''सूर अधमकी कौन चलावे उदर भरे अरु सोये''। ऐसे अधम जो हैं, जिनकी बात नाहीं करनी। जो–सरीर को सुख चाहत है। या प्रकार के हम है। परंतु श्रीआचार्यजी के ग्रन्थ को पाठ सदा करियत है। ताको भाव यह, जो–ऐसेहू अधमकों श्रीआचार्यजी के ग्रन्थ मात्र कहे। भावहू न जानत होइ तो पाठ ही के किये तें श्रीठाकुरजी सगरो अनुभव जतावे। तातें यह कहि अपनो पुरुषारथ नाहीं कहे। श्रीआचार्यजी को प्रताप कहे, जो–उनके ग्रन्थ के पाठतें कृपा प्रभु करत हैं। या प्रकार प्रेम में लपेटे बचन तुलसां के सुनिके श्रीगुसांईजी को हृदय भरि आयो।

ऐसी भगवदीय तुलसां हती। जिनके ऊपर श्रीगुसांईजी सदा प्रसन्न रहते तातें इनकी वार्ता को पार नाहीं। सो कहां तांई कहिये।

अब श्रीआचार्यजी के सेवक पद्मनाभदास के बेटा ताकी बहू पारवती तिनकी वार्ता को भाव कहत हैं–

भावप्रकाश–ए राजसी भक्त है। पद्मनाभदास तो चंपकलता अष्टसखीन में। तिनकी सखी सुचरिता, सो इहां पुरुषोत्तमदास मेहरा क्षत्री भये। सो सुन्दर चरित्र सबकों सुखरूप कार्य के करता हैं, ए। और सुचरिता की सखी रूपविलोसिनी है। सो यहां पारवती भई। सो लीला में पारवती को रूप बहोत सुन्दर हतो। सो राजसी है। अपनो रूप बहोत सँवारती। सो रूप के गर्व तें लीला सों गिरी।

वार्ता–प्रसंग १– सो पारवती श्रीठाकुरजी की सेवा नीकी भांति सों करती। पुरुषोत्तमदास मेहरा इनकों नीकी भांति सों जानते। सो जब कन्नौज जातें तब याके घर उतरते। सो एक समें पुरुषोत्तमदास मेहरा कन्नौज आइ, अड़ेल श्रीगुसांईजी के दरसन कों गये। यहां पारवती के हाथ पांव सुफेद भये। तब ग्लानि दैन्यता भई। तब अपने पूर्व स्वरूप की हू खबरि परी, जो–मैं पुरुषोत्तमदास की सखी हों। मेरो काम इन द्वारा होयगो। तब पत्र पुरुषोत्तमदास कों लिख्यो, जो–मेरी बिनती तुम श्रीगुसांईजी सों करियो। मेरी देह को यह प्रकार भयो है। तातें मोकों सेवा करत पाक करत बहुत ग्लानि आवति है।

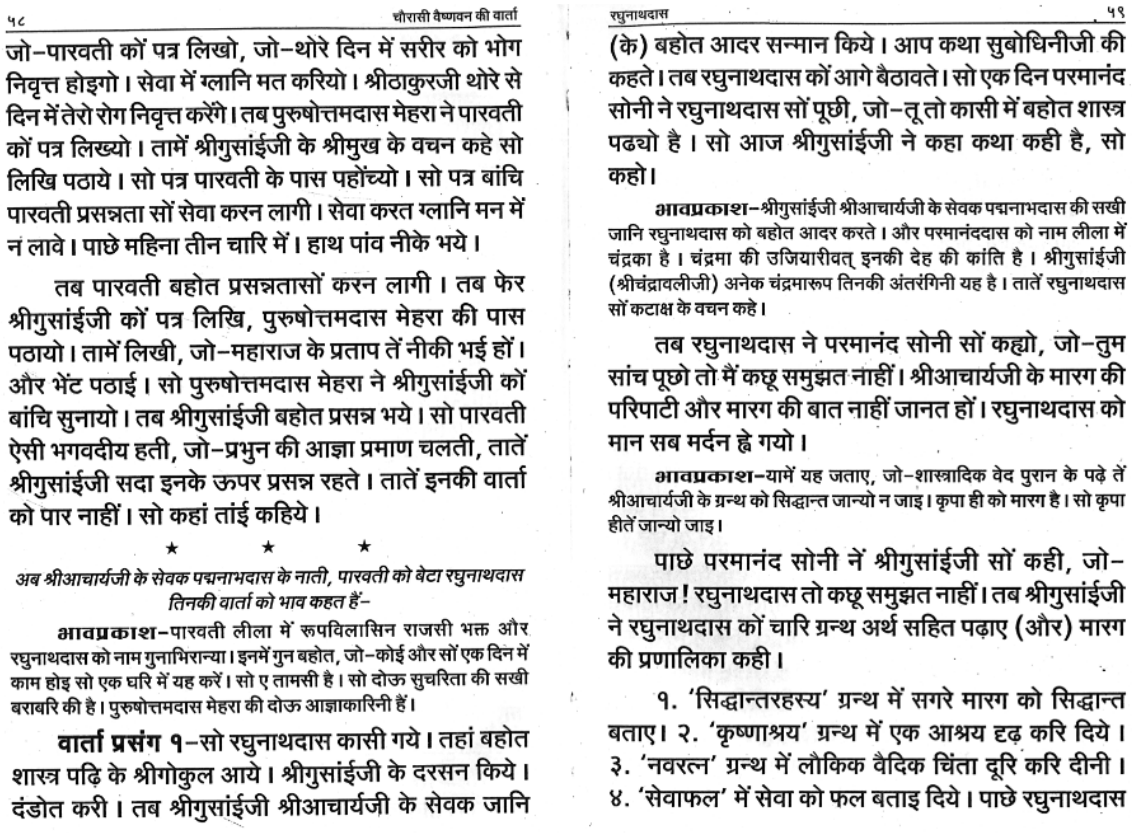
भावप्रकाश–ताको आशय यह है, जो–मैं (ने) श्रीठाकुरजी सों रूप को गर्व कियो ताको फल पायो। अब कृपा करेंगे सो श्रीगुसांईजी सों विनती करि लिखिये।

यह पत्र पठायो, एक मोहौर श्रीगुसांईजी कों भेंट पठाई। सो पत्र पुरुषोत्तमदास नें श्रीगुसांईजी कों बांचि सुनायो। मोहौर आगे राखी। बिनती कीनी। तब श्रीगुसांईजी पुरुषोत्तमदास कों कहे, जो–दिन दोई चारि में कहूंगो।

भावप्रकाश–सो यातें, जो–लीला में रूप को गर्व ता अपराध तें (यह) भयो। तथा और हू कोई अपराध न होइ। सो बिचारे। तब और अपराध नाहीं देखे।

फेरि तीन दिन पाछे श्रीगुसांईजी ने पुरुषोत्तमदास सों कही।

Image of Braj Bhasha text (Parīkh, *Caurāsī Vaiṣṇavan kī Vārtā* (2011), 56-57).



५८ चौरासी वैष्णवन की वार्ता

जो–पारवती कों पत्र लिखो, जो–थोरे दिन में सरीर को भोग निवृत्त होइगो। सेवा में ग्लानि मत करियो। श्रीठाकुरजी थोरे से दिन में तेरो रोग निवृत्त करेंगे। तब पुरुषोत्तमदास मेहरा ने पारवती कों पत्र लिख्यो। तामें श्रीगुसांईजी के श्रीमुख के वचन कहे सो लिखि पठाये। सो पत्र पारवती के पास पहोंच्यो। सो पत्र बांचि पारवती प्रसन्नता सों सेवा करन लागी। सेवा करत ग्लानि मन में न लावे। पाछे महिना तीन चारि में। हाथ पांव नीके भये।

तब पारवती बहोत प्रसन्नतासों करन लागी। तब फेर श्रीगुसांईजी कों पत्र लिखि, पुरुषोत्तमदास मेहरा की पास पठायो। तामें लिखी, जो–महाराज के प्रताप तें नीकी भई हों। और भेंट पठाई। सो पुरुषोत्तमदास मेहरा ने श्रीगुसांईजी कों बांचि सुनायो। तब श्रीगुसांईजी बहोत प्रसन्न भये। सो पारवती ऐसी भगवदीय हती, जो–प्रभुन की आज्ञा प्रमाण चलती, तातें श्रीगुसांईजी सदा इनके ऊपर प्रसन्न रहते। तातें इनकी वार्ता को पार नाहीं। सो कहां तांई कहिये।

★ ★ ★

अब श्रीआचार्यजी के सेवक पद्मनाभदास के नाती, पारवती को बेटा रघुनाथदास तिनकी वार्ता को भाव कहत हैं–

भावप्रकाश–पारवती लीला में रूपविलासिन राजसी भक्त और रघुनाथदास को नाम गुनाभिरान्या। इनमें गुन बहोत, जो–कोई और सों एक दिन में काम होइ सो एक घरि में यह करें। सो ए तामसी है। सो दोऊ सुचरिता की सखी बराबरि की है। पुरुषोत्तमदास मेहरा की दोऊ आज्ञाकारिनी हैं।

वार्ता प्रसंग १–सो रघुनाथदास कासी गये। तहां बहोत शास्त्र पढ़ि के श्रीगोकुल आये। श्रीगुसांईजी के दरसन किये। दंडोत करी। तब श्रीगुसांईजी श्रीआचार्यजी के सेवक जानि

रघुनाथदास ५९

(के) बहोत आदर सन्मान किये। आप कथा सुबोधिनीजी की कहते। तब रघुनाथदास कों आगे बैठावते। सो एक दिन परमानंद सोनी ने रघुनाथदास सों पूछी, जो–तू तो कासी में बहोत शास्त्र पढ्यो है। सो आज श्रीगुसांईजी ने कहा कथा कही है, सो कहो।

भावप्रकाश–श्रीगुसांईजी श्रीआचार्यजी के सेवक पद्मनाभदास की सखी जानि रघुनाथदास को बहोत आदर करते। और परमानंददास को नाम लीला में चंद्रका है। चंद्रमा की उजियारीवत् इनकी देह की कांति है। श्रीगुसांईजी (श्रीचंद्रावलीजी) अनेक चंद्रमारूप तिनकी अंतरंगिनी यह है। तातें रघुनाथदास सों कटाक्ष के वचन कहे।

तब रघुनाथदास ने परमानंद सोनी सों कह्यो, जो–तुम सांच पूछो तो मैं कछू समुझत नाहीं। श्रीआचार्यजी के मारग की परिपाटी और मारग की बात नाहीं जानत हों। रघुनाथदास को मान सब मर्दन ह्वे गयो।

भावप्रकाश–यामें यह जताए, जो–शास्त्रादिक वेद पुरान के पढ़े तें श्रीआचार्यजी के ग्रन्थ को सिद्धान्त जान्यो न जाइ। कृपा ही को मारग है। सो कृपा हीतें जान्यो जाइ।

पाछे परमानंद सोनी नें श्रीगुसांईजी सों कही, जो–महाराज! रघुनाथदास तो कछू समुझत नाहीं। तब श्रीगुसांईजी ने रघुनाथदास कों चारि ग्रन्थ अर्थ सहित पढ़ाए (और) मारग की प्रणालिका कही।

१. 'सिद्धान्तरहस्य' ग्रन्थ में सगरे मारग को सिद्धान्त बताए। २. 'कृष्णाश्रय' ग्रन्थ में एक आश्रय दृढ़ करि दिये। ३. 'नवरत्न' ग्रन्थ में लौकिक वैदिक चिंता दूरि करि दीनी। ४. 'सेवाफल' में सेवा को फल बताइ दिये। पाछे रघुनाथदास

Image of Braj Bhasha text (Parīkh, *Caurāsī Vaiṣṇavan kī Vārtā* (2011), 58-59).

Example A (translation): The following *vārtā* describes events in the life of a devotee named Tulsam (*Tulsāṃ*), whose account appears in a sequence of narratives that also describe her family members, including her father Padmanabhadas. My translation of this and the following *vārtā* are meant to be more literal than literary, although I have omitted some of the minor repetitions. I have also provided comments of clarification in brackets throughout. Comments in footnotes provide further information about basic theological, social, and linguistic details of the narratives.

> **Now is told the *bhāv* of the *vārtā* of Tulsam, the daughter of Shri Acharyaji's *sevak* Padmanabhadas.**[2]
>
> ***Bhāvprakāś***: In *līlā* she [Tulsam] was a *sakhī* of Padmanabhadas. Padmanabhadas is Champaklata [in *līlā* and] is one of [the group of Radha's] eight *sakhī*s.[3]

[2] Here I take *bhāv* to mean the "mood" or "meaning" of the *vārtā*. *Sevak* is a term used in the *vārtā*s to describe any individual who has been formally initiated into the *sampradāy* by Vallabhacharya or Vitthalnath. It literally means "servant," but refers specifically to one who performs *sevā*.

Champaklata's *sakhī* is Manikundala [that is, Manikundala is Tulsam in her form in *līlā*]. Just as the aura (*jyotī*) of a gem (*maṇī*) in an earring (*kuṇḍālī*), [Manikundala] spreads light in four directions. Tulsam is a *sāttvik* devotee.[4] She is attentive to the command of Padmanabhadas.

***Prasaṅg* 1**: One day a Vaishnava came to the house of Tulsam. He was a *sevak* of Shri Acharyaji. He took *darśan* of Shri Mathuranathji at *rājbhog āratī*.[5] Then Tulsam said to this Vaishnava: "Rise and take a bath. Take *mahāprasād*."[6] Then the Vaishnava said: "I will go home to take my bath." Then Tulsam remained silent. Then the Vaishnava got up and left for his home. Tulsam felt some regret: "That Vaishnava has left my house hungry."

Bhāvprakāś: The reason why he did not take the *mahāprasād* is because of his caste convention.[7] Tulsam understood this and therefore did not insist [that he take the *prasād*]. He was a *gauḍ* (Bengali) Brahmin and in *līlā* he is the *sakhī* of Lalitaji, Saurbha by name. And Tulsam is the *sakhī* of Champaklata. And Shri Mathuranathji is under the power of Tulsam. Therefore, this Vaishnava did not eat the *mahāprasād*. Without the command of Lalitaji how could he take it? Therefore, this Vaishnava went to his own home, [causing] Tulsam to feel regret.

Then it occurred to her that: "It must be due to his caste conventions that he did not take the *sakhaṛī* food items.[8] Alright then, tomorrow morning I will serve

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[3] *Līlā*, as discussed in Chapter One, refers to the divine pastimes of Lord Krishna, but also specifically to the eternally divine state (*nitya līlā*) in which all primary figures from the *vārtā*s have a divine double as a *sakhī* or *sakhā* of Krishna and his divine lover Swamini, or Radha.

[4] *Sāttvik* refers to one of the four *guṇ*s or "qualities" that Hariray applies to each of the protagonists in the *84VV* and *252VV*. See Chapter One for a more detailed description. *Sāttvik* means: "endowed with the quality of *sattva*," or "purity." It can also mean "virtuous" or "sincere" (McGregor, *The Oxford Hindi-English Dictionary*, 1003). This is the highest quality that Hariray applies to the *vārtā*s' protagonists.

[5] Mathuranathji is the Krishna *svarūp* that Tulsam and her family care for in the *84VV*. This *svarūp* continues to be worshiped by descendants of the First House of the *sampradāy* in Kota, Rajasthan. *Rājbhog* refers to one of eight established periods of *sevā*—the time, usually before noon, when Krishna *svarūp*s are offered a full meal.

[6] *Mahāprasād* refers to the consecrated food offering—first offered to the Krishna *svarūp* and then consumed by the devotee.

[7] The Braj Bhasha reads: "*jñānt vyauhār*." Here *jñānt* seems to refer to a *gotra* or a particularly lineage, rather than to caste as such. Both parties are Brahmin—one *gauḍ* (Bengali) and the other unspecified.

[8] *Sakhaṛī* refers to grains that have been cooked in water, but can also include certain kinds of bread and various kinds of cooked, raw, or pickled fruits and vegetables. *Ansakhaṛī* refers to

prasād of puri." Later she prepared and set aside some sieved flour. Then she went to sleep. That day Tulsam did not take *mahāprasād*. Then, that night, Shri Mathuranathji said to Tulsam in a dream: "In the morning serve *mahāprasād* to that Vaishnava. He will not eat *mahāprasād* at his own home."

> ***Bhāvprakāś***: From this it should be understood that: "Tomorrow the Vaishnava will take the *mahāprasād*. Do not worry." Later [after the first incident at Tulsam's home], Shri Thakurji had questioned the Vaishnava: "Why did you not take the *mahāprasād* from Tulsam's place? Take it in the morning. This is also the command of Lalitaji." Indeed Lalitaji also said: "Take the *mahāprasād* from Tulsam's place. There is no distinction between her and our own loving emotions (*bhāv*) [for Krishna]."[9]

***Prasaṅg* 2:** Then at dawn Tulsam prepared puris, woke Shri Thakurji and began to perform *śṛṅgār sevā*.[10] In the meantime, that Vaishnava took his morning bath and arrived at Tulsam's house to do Shri Thakurji's *sevā*. Tulsam prepared the meal (*bhog*) [for Shri Thakurji] and came outside. Then she said, "Jai Shri Krishna" to the Vaishnava. Then Tulsam said: "Get up, go bathe, and remember the Lord." Then the Vaishnava said: "I have come, bathed and am in a ritually pure state (*aparas*)." When the time came, Tulsam completed the *rājbhog* and performed *āratī*.[11] The Vaishnava took *darśan*. Then Tulsam prepared Shri Thakurji for rest, came outside, and placed *prasād* in a leaf plate for the Vaishnava. On [the plate] she placed puris, sugar balls, chickpea dumplings in curd, and pickles.[12] "Take the *prasād*," she said. Then the Vaishnava said: "I will

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sweets, dairy products (milk, butter, curd etc.), fried breads, and certain kinds of dried fruits and nuts. For further on types of food and food preparation in the *puṣṭimārgīy* community, see: Bennett, "In Nanda Baba's House: The Devotional Experience in Pushti Marg Temples, 197.

[9] This is a fine example of how Hariray explains or justifies characters' behaviors in the *laukik* world by referring to *līlā*. On the one hand, the Vaishnava does not accept certain food items due to "caste conventions" in the *laukik* world—he is a Bengali Brahmin and Tulsam's family is from a different (unspecified) Brahmin community. On the other hand, Hariray explains that the *real* reason that the Vaishnava does not accept the food is because he is in a different group of *sakhī*s in *līlā* and therefore needs to receive permission from his head *sakhī* before accepting food from a *sakhī* of a different group.

[10] *Śṛṅgār sevā* refers to one of the eight established periods of *sevā*, but also more generally to ritually dressing and decorating a Krishna *svarūp*.

[11] *Āratī* is: "a ceremony performed in worshipping a god: a dish holding a lamp, burning *ghī*, incense or other articles, is moved in a series of circles" before the deity (a Krishna *svarūp*, in this case) (McGregor, *The Oxford Hindi-English Dictionary*, 92).

[12] In the Braj Bhasha text, these items are listed as: *pūrī*, *būrā*, *dahītharā*, and *sandhāno*. In other versions of the *84VV*, *dahītharā* reads *dahībara*, which is likely the correct form of the word.

not take this. Put out *sakhaṛī prasād*—that I will take." Then Tulsam said, do not feel concerned—this is after all the way of your caste conventions." Then the Vaishnava said: "This is indeed true. At first I had it that way, but now I have been given the command [to accept the *prasād* that you have offered]. Therefore, now I will take the *mahāprasād*." Then Tulsam put out both *sakhaṛī* and *ansakhaṛī prasād* before the Vaishnava. Then that Vaishnava took the *sakhaṛī prasād*. After taking *prasād*, the Vaishnava went to his own house. Tulsam was very pleased.

> ***Bhāvprakāś***: From this it should be understood that if a Vaishnava comes to your home, you should show him all the respect in your power. Why? It is said in *Śrī Bhāgavat* (*BhP*) that the house in which you do not even get [offered] water etc. is considered to be the hole of a snake. So Tulsam showed the Vaishnava such affection.

***Prasaṅg* 3:** Once Shri Gusainji (Vitthalnath) came to Tulsam's house. Then thinking him to be greater than [even] Shri Thakurji, Tulsam performed *sevā* very well [for her *guru*] and Shri Gusainji was very pleased. One day Shri Gusainji was resting after his meal. Tulsam pleased Shri Gusainji by reciting accounts of the Lord (*bhagavadvārtā*). Then, Shri Gusainji who was in a state of great satisfaction from the *Bhāgavata Purāṇā*, said to Tulsam: "Of course the child of [such a great devotee as] Padmanabhadas should be just like this."

> ***Bhāvprakāś***: The meaning of this is that, if she is a *sakhī* in *līlā*, then why would she not be like this? [In *līlā*] Shri Gusainji has the form of Chandravaliji. He relates to Shri Thakurji through the [romantic] sentiment of one who belongs to another (*parakīyā bhāv*). Therefore, the comic sentiment (*hāsya*) is very dear to him. He asks saucily: "Does Shri Thakurji make you experience the bliss of his physical form? You are too a *sakhī* after all. Doing the *sevā* of Shri Thakurji you also gain some power over Him. Therefore, you are also involved in our partnership." He speaks with this manner of sarcasm. But Tulsam is a pure *sāttvik* devotee. She is not very saucy. She is refined.

Later, Shri Gusainji asked Tulsam: "Does Shri Thakurji make you share in the depths of devotional feeling? (*sānubhāvatā jantāvat*)" Then Tulsam said: "My Lord. I eat my fill and sleep comfortably. But recitation of Shri Acharyaji's scriptures should be performed constantly." Shri Gusainji was very pleased [by her reply].

> ***Bhāvprakāś***: "I eat my fill and sleep easily" [can mean]: as though we were receptacles, Shri Thakurji makes us share in that experience to the extent that our stomachs may contain the *rasa*. Therefore in the company of Shri Thakurji we are allowed to sleep comfortably. [We maintain the] sentiment of a woman who is faithful to her husband (*svakīyā bhāv*), are happy, and there is no [reason to] worry: this is the primary sense. [From the perspective of focusing one's] *bhāv* on the *guru*, then the meaning [of what Tulsam said to Shri Gusainji is that]: "My Lord! Torn

away from Shri Thakurji, I have taken numerous births, but in no birth have I filled my belly. I have not slept happily. Now, you give me grace and have taken me into your refuge. Now, in this birth, my stomach is filled and I have also slept in the sole refuge of Shri Thakurji. I endured sadness in each birth due to ignorance." This is one meaning [of Tulsam's statement].

And from the perspective of humility (*dainya pakṣ*), [the statement] "What devotional feelings does [Thakurji] make us feel?" [can be taken to mean the following:] "My stomach is filled. I sleep easily. Just as an animal [simply] eats and sleeps. [Any further] functions [come about because they] are imposed by the will of others: hit [the animal] and then it will perform an action. Similarly is our fondness for eating and drinking." [Some people perform] *sevā* because of the fear of others' condemnation, but this is not how the children of Padmanabhadas perform *sevā*. In this way it is done for the sake of public prestige. Therefore, [we can take Tulsam's answer to the statement], "What does He make me experience?" [in the sense of what] Surdas has sung: "Who can manage the lowly, they simply fill their bellies and sleep." [That is,] "These base people should not even be spoken to. They merely desire comfort of the body. I am also such a type. However the lessons of Shri Acharyaji's scriptures should always be recited." The sense (*bhāv*) of this [statement is that] even though [the base] may not understand the meaning of Shri Acharyaji's scriptures, through the mere [act of] recitation Shri Acharyaji [still] shows all of his power. Therefore, [Tulsam's readings of Shri Acharyaji's works do not indicate her own] human accomplishments (*puruṣārth*). Rather the beauty of reciting Shri Acharyaji's works [is that by simply reciting them] the Lord shows his grace. In this way, having heard the love-wrapped words of Tulsam, Shri Gusainji's heart was heavy with pleasure.[13]

Tulsam was such a devotee [and] Shri Gusainji always remained pleased with her. Therefore, there is no limit to the extent of her *vārtā*; how much can [the essence of it] be revealed?[14]

[13] Hariray's various ways of interpreting Tulsam's statement and relationship with Vitthalnath (Shri Gusainji) are not entirely clear. Those with whom I have read this *vārtā* in Ahmedabad have asserted that Hariray's gloss is meant to explain that Tulsam's experience of Shri Thakurji is beyond verbal expression. Because she is such a pure devotee, it would be absurd to think of her as a mere animal who eats and sleeps. She not only performs *sevā* for Shri Thakurji and for her *guru*, but also reads and lives by the scriptures of Vallabhacharya.

[14] *so kahāṃ tāīṃ kahiye*: "how much can be revealed," or "to what extent can it be told," is the most common way in which a *vārtā* is concluded in both the *84VV* and *252VV*.

Example B (Braj Bhasha text):

विष्णुदूत कहे, आजु छोड़त है, परंतु अब कबहू निंदा करेगो तो तोकों न छोड़ेंगे। यह कहि विष्णुदूत गये। तब दूसरे दिन वैष्णव मिलिकें प्रभुदास की बड़ाई करत हते तहां कीरत चोधरी आयो। तब सगरे वैष्णव चुप ह्वै रहे। तब कीरत चोधरी ने कही, वैष्णव! तुम कहे सो सांच, प्रभुदास बड़े भगवदीय हे। उनकों तीर्थ सों कहा काम? उनकों श्रीठाकुरजी को आश्रय है। या प्रकार बड़ाई बहोत करी। तब वैष्णव चकित होय रहे। और पूछी जो–तुम तो पहले निंदा करत हते और आजु बहोत बड़ाई करत हो ताको कारन कहा? तब कीरत चोधरी ने अपनी पीठि दिखाई। और कहे, जो–चारि जने मोकों रात्रिकों बहुत मारें और कहे, जो तू प्रभुदास की निंदा यों करत है? तातें वे बड़े भगवदीय हते। तुम सुखेन उनकी बड़ाई करो। तब सगरे वैष्णव प्रसन्न होइ बड़ाई करन लागे। सो प्रभुदास ऐसे भगवदीय हते। वार्ता ॥२१॥

भावप्रकाश–यह प्रभुदास की वार्ता में यह सिद्धांत भयो, जो–पुष्टिमार्गीय वैष्णव कों कोई तीर्थ को आश्रय न करनो। श्रीआचार्यजी को आश्रय राखनो। और भगवदीय की निंदा करे, जो–याहू लोक में दुःख पावें। मरें तब नरक में जाइ। काहेतें? भगवान कों भगवदीय प्रिय हैं। अपुनो अपराध सहे परंतु भगवदीय को अपराध नहीं सहि सकें।

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अब श्रीआचार्यजी महाप्रभुन के सेवक, पुरुषोत्तमदास स्त्री–पुरुष क्षत्री हते, आगरे में राजघाट पर रहते, तिनकी वार्ता को भाव कहत हैं–

भावप्रकाश–ये पुरुषोत्तमदास लीला में श्रीचंद्रावलीजी की अंतरंग सखी हैं। पुरुषोत्तमदास को नाम माधवी, इनकी स्त्री को नाम मालती है। सो ये आगरे में राजघाट पर दोय क्षत्री के घर पास हते। तहां जन्म दोउ लिये। सो उन दोय क्षत्री के परस्पर बहोत मित्रता हती। सो दोऊ जने कही, अपनें बेटा, बेटी को विवाह करें तो आछो। सो दोऊ के दोऊ भये। तब विवाह किये। पाछें बरस दिन के भीतर दोऊ के

पिता की देह छूटी। सो श्रीआचार्यजी महाप्रभु आगरे पधारे। सो ता समय पुरुषोत्तमदास और इनकी स्त्री बारी पर बैठें हते। सो श्रीआचार्यजी को दरसन होत ही दोऊ आपस में बतराये। जो–इनकी सरनि जैये। सो पुरुषोत्तमदास दौरिकें उछंडे माथें श्रीआचार्यजी कों दंडौत् किये। और बिनती किये, महाराज! हमकों कृपा करिकें सरनि लीजिये। मेरे घर पधारिये। तब श्रीआचार्यजी कहें, तुम अड़ेल में आइयो। श्रीगुसांईजी के पास नाम पाइयो। तब पुरुषोत्तमदास नें कही, महाराज! श्रीगुसांईजी में और आप में कहा भेद है? तातें आपु सेवक करिये। सरीर को कहा भरोसो है। पाछें आपुके दरसन दुर्लभ हैं। या प्रकार दैवी जीव है सो स्वरूप को ज्ञान भयो। तब श्रीआचार्यजी पुरुषोत्तमदास के घर पधारें। पुरुषोत्तमदास कों और इनकी स्त्री कों नाम निवेदन करायें। तब पुरुषोत्तमदास ने और इनकी स्त्री ने बिनती करी, महाराज! अब हमकों कहा आज्ञा है? तब श्रीआचार्यजी कहे, भगवद् सेवा करो। तब पुरुषोत्तमदास नें कही, महाराज! श्रीठाकुरजी प्रधराय दीजिये। सेवा करें। तब श्रीआचार्यजी कहें, तुम्हारे माथे कलंक आवेगो। सो तुम गंगा न्हान कों जैयो। तब अड़ेल आवेगो तब तुम्हारे माथे श्रीठाकुरजी पधराइ देइंगे। अबहि तुम्हारे दोऊ जने की माता हैं। सो आसुरी जीव हैं। सो क्लेश करेंगी। तब पुरुषोत्तमदास स्त्री सहित कहें, माता तो हम पर दोउ की बहोत हित करत हैं। सो क्लेश कैसे होइगो? तब श्रीआचार्यजी कहें, अबलौं तुम वैष्णव न हतें। तातें प्रीति करत हैं। वैष्णव भये सुनेंगी तब देखोगे। तातें हम इहां ते बेगे पधारेंगे। क्लेश मोकों भावत नाहीं। तब पुरुषोत्तमदास स्त्री सहित डरपिके बेग ही भेट जो बनि आई सो करी। श्रीआचार्यजी को विदा किये। श्रीआचार्यजी क्लेशजानि ततकाल अड़ेल पधारे। सो पुरुषोत्तमदास और इनकी स्त्री डरपि कें तीन दिनलों अपनी माता कों वैष्णव भये न बतायें। कोरो दूध ल्याय के पीके रहें। तब पुरुषोत्तमदास की माता नें गरे में माला देखी, तब कह्यो, बेटा! गरे में माला कैसी? आपुने क्षत्री जनेऊ सर्वोपरि हैं। माला कैसी? तब पुरुषोत्तमदास बोले नाहीं। तब वह पुरुषोत्तमदास की स्त्री को माथो गरो उधारिकें देख्यो। सो माला देखिके बहोत रोई। कह्यो, ये स्त्री–पुरुष दोउ वैरागी भये। पाछें जाय के पुरुषोत्तमदास की माता नें पुरुषोत्तमदास की स्त्री की माता सों कह्यो, जो–तेरी बेटी और मेरो बेटा दोऊ माला पहिरी हैं। दोऊ वैरागी भये, अब कहा करनो? तब उननें कही, चलो इनकी माला उतराउ, नाहीं तो दोऊ मरेंगे। सो दोऊ आयके स्त्री पुरुष सों कहें, जो–याहि छिन माला दोऊ उतारो। नाहीं तो दोऊन की हत्या लेऊगे। तब पुरुषोत्तमदास ने दस–बीस क्षत्री सगे संबंधी बुलाय कें सबके आगें माता सों कही, जो–यह माला हमारे सिर के साटे हैं। माथो जाय तो चिंता नाहीं परंतु माला तो न छोड़ेंगे। तातें तुम्हारो माला सों कहा काम है? तुम्हारो मन होय तो हमारे भेले रहो, चहिये सो और कहो तो तुमकों न्यारो घर करिकें देय, मनुष्य चाकर

Image of Braj Bhasha text (Parīkh, *Caurāsī Vaiṣṇavan kī Vārtā* (2011), 150-151).

रहेगो। जो तुमको चहिये सो लेहु। हम सों बनेगी सो तुम्हारी टहल करेंगे। चाहो तुम याहि घर में रहो। हम न्यारो घर करिकें रहें। तुम कहो तेसे करें। क्लेश मति करो। परंतु हम माला सर्वथा न छोड़ेंगे। और तुम्हारे हाथ को छुयो खानपान न करेंगे। तुम माला पहिरो, वैष्णव होउ, तब तुम्हारे हाथको पानी काम आवें। यह सुनिके दोउ की माता क्रोध करि कें कह्यो, जो–तुम दोउ वेरागी भये (अब) हमहू कों वेरागी करत हौं? हम पाले हैं, अब हम चमार–भंगी ठेहरे तुमारे लेखे, जो–हमारो छूयो जल न लोगे! हम दोउ तुमारे ऊपर मरेंगी। या प्रकार पांच दिनलों जल कोइ न लियो। सगरे सगे संबंधी गांव को हाकिम हू आयकें सबकों समुझायो। परंतु दोउ न माने। सो रात्रि कों पुरुषोत्तमदास स्त्री–पुरुष सोय गये, तब दोऊ की माता घर में कूप हतो तामें गिरि परी, सो देह छूटि गई। सबेरे दोऊन को संस्कार पुरुषोत्तमदास ने कियो। तब ज्ञाति के सगरे कहन लागें, जो–तुम दोउ स्त्री–पुरुष कों हत्या लागी तातें गंगाजी न्हाय आवो। तब ज्ञाति में लेय। तब स्त्री–पुरुष विचारि किये, जो–अपुने श्रीआचार्यजी पास जायकें भगवद् सेवा पधरावनो है। सो चलो। तब दोउ जनें तहाँ तें चले। प्रयाग आये। तहां न्हाये। पाछें अड़ेल में आइ श्रीआचार्यजी, श्रीगुसांईजी कों दंडवत् करि सब बात कही, महाराज आपु कहे सोई भयो। दोऊ की माता मरी। अब क्लेश मिट्यो। अब भगवद् सेवा पधराय दीजें। तब श्रीआचार्यजी कहें, उह दोउ आसुरी जीव हती। परंतु तुम वैष्णव भये तातें उनकी गति होइगी। जा कुल में वैष्णव होय ताको सगरो कुल कृतार्थ होयगो। तुम भगवद् सेवा करो। सो अड़ेल में एक पूजा मार्गीय ब्राह्मण वृद्ध हतो वाके घर लालजी हते। उनसों कहे, जो तुमतें पूजा न बनत होइ तो श्रीठाकुरजी हम कों देउ। तब उन ब्राह्मण ने कही, मैं यह विचारत हतो, जो–ठाकुर किनकों देउ। अब मोसों पूजा नाहीं बनत है। तब श्रीआचार्यजी पंचामृत स्नान कराय पुरुषोत्तमदास के माथे पधराये। कछूक दिन अड़ेल में रहि सेवा की रीति सब सीखि कें पाछें विदा होय आगरे में आये। सगरी ज्ञाति की रसोई ब्राह्मण भोजन कराई लौकिक अपवाद हू मिटाय दोऊ स्त्री–पुरुष भगवद् सेवा करने लागें।

वार्ता–प्रसंग १–सो एक समय श्रीगुसांईजी आगरे पधारे। सो पुरुषोत्तमदास के घर उतरे। तब पुरुषोत्तमदास की स्त्री छिपि रही। तब श्रीगुसांईजी ने पुरुषोत्तमदास सों पूछ्यो, जो तेरी स्त्री कहां है? तब पुरुषोत्तमदास ने कही, महाराज! जनेउ

टूट्यो होयगो। तब श्रीगुसांईजी जाने भिन्न बैठी होयगी। तब श्रीगुसांईजी स्नान करिकें रसोई करि दार, भात, पांच–सात साक, खीर सब किये। रोटी बेलन के समय पुरुषोत्तमदास की स्त्री न्हाइ के आय बैठी। तब श्रीगुसांईजी पूछें, तू कहां हती अब लों? तब कह्यो, महाराज! कछू काम हतो।

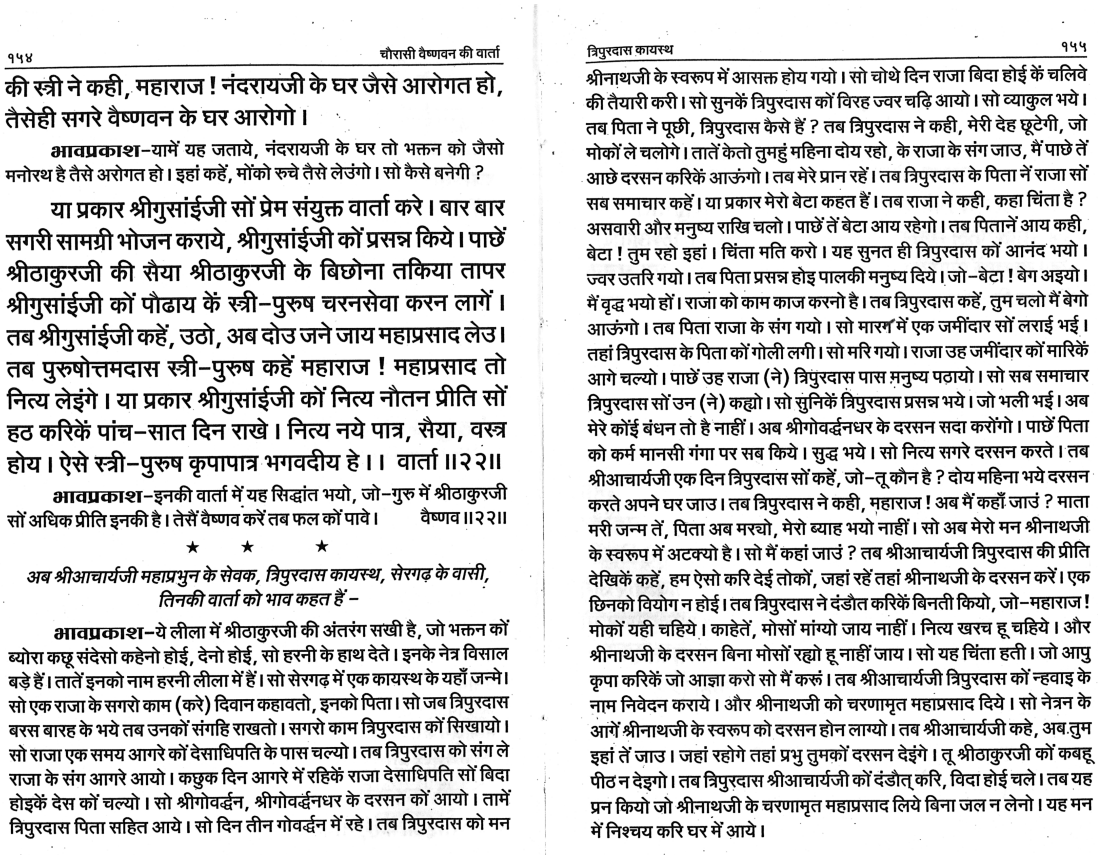
भावप्रकाश–सो अब अटकाव को दिन पांचमो हतो। सो स्त्री छिप रही, जो–बिना न्हाये श्रीगुसांईजी कों मुख क्यों दिखाऊँ?

पाछें रोटी बेलि दियो। सगरी रसोई श्रीगुसांईजी करिकें श्रीठाकुरजी कों भोग धरे। पाछें भोग सराय अनोसर कराये। तब पुरुषोत्तमदास स्त्री–पुरुष श्रीगुसांईजी सों कहें, महाराज! यही थार कटोरा में भोजन करो। तब श्रीगुसांईजी कहें, श्रीठाकुरजी के पात्र में कैसे करिये? हम पातरि में करि भोजन करेंगे। तब पुरुषोत्तमदास कहे, महाराज! द्रव्य तो निघट नाहीं गयो। और कसेरे सब मूए नाहीं। और नये पात्र आवेंगे। या प्रकार उह कहिकें श्रीगुसांईजी कों वाही श्रीठाकुरजी के पात्र में भोजन कराये।

भावप्रकाश–सो यातें जो इनकों श्रीगुसांईजी में भाव है। और लीला में श्रीचंद्रावली श्रीठाकुरजी संग वही पात्र में भोजन करतीं। सो ये श्रीचंद्रावलीजी की सखी हैं। सब लीला की स्फूर्ति हैं। तातें श्रीठाकुरजी के पात्र में भोजन कराये और स्त्री–पुरुष को श्रीगुसांईजी में स्नेह बहोत हैं। सो यह विचारे, दूसरे पात्र में फेर ठलाये तें सामग्री को सबाद फिरि जायगो। सगरी सीतल ह्वै जायगी। तातें और में ठलायवे तें ढील भोजन करिवे में होयगी, सोउ आछी नाहीं। तातें स्नेह सों उही पात्र में भोजन कराये।

पाछें श्रीगुसांईजी भोजन करिवे बैठें। तब पुरुषोत्तमदास की स्त्री पास बैठी। कह्यो, महाराज! यह सामग्री आरोगो। तब श्रीगुसांईजी कहें, मोकों चहिये सो मैं लेउंगो। तब पुरुषोत्तमदास

Image of Braj Bhasha text (Parīkh, *Caurāsī Vaiṣṇavan kī Vārtā* (2011), 152-153).



१५४ चौरासी वैष्णवन की वार्ता

की स्त्री ने कही, महाराज ! नंदरायजी के घर जैसे आरोगत हो, तैसेही सगरे वैष्णवन के घर आरोगो।

भावप्रकाश–यामें यह जताये, नंदरायजी के घर तो भक्तन को जैसो मनोरथ है तैसे अरोगत हो। इहां कहें, मोंको रुचे तैसे लेउंगो। सो कैसे बनेगी ?

या प्रकार श्रीगुसांईजी सों प्रेम संयुक्त वार्ता करे। बार बार सगरी सामग्री भोजन कराये, श्रीगुसांईजी कों प्रसन्न किये। पाछें श्रीठाकुरजी की सैया श्रीठाकुरजी के बिछोना तकिया तापर श्रीगुसांईजी कों पौढाय कें स्त्री–पुरुष चरनसेवा करन लागें। तब श्रीगुसांईजी कहें, उठो, अब दोउ जने जाय महाप्रसाद लेउ। तब पुरुषोत्तमदास स्त्री–पुरुष कहें महाराज ! महाप्रसाद तो नित्य लेइंगे। या प्रकार श्रीगुसांईजी कों नित्य नौतन प्रीति सों हठ करिकें पांच–सात दिन राखे। नित्य नये पात्र, सैया, वस्त्र होय। ऐसे स्त्री–पुरुष कृपापात्र भगवदीय हे।। वार्ता ॥२२॥

भावप्रकाश–इनकी वार्ता में यह सिद्धांत भयो, जो–गुरु में श्रीठाकुरजी सों अधिक प्रीति इनकी है। तेसें वैष्णव करें तब फल कों पावे। वैष्णव ॥२२॥

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अब श्रीआचार्यजी महाप्रभुन के सेवक, त्रिपुरदास कायस्थ, सेरगढ़ के वासी, तिनकी वार्ता को भाव कहत हैं –

भावप्रकाश–ये लीला में श्रीठाकुरजी की अंतरंग सखी है, जो भक्तन कों ब्योरा कछू संदेसो कहेनो होई, देनो होई, सो हरनी के हाथ देते। इनके नेत्र विसाल बड़े हैं। तातें इनको नाम हरनी लीला में हैं। सो सेरगढ़ में एक कायस्थ के यहाँ जन्मे। सो एक राजा के सगरो काम (करे) दिवान कहावतो, इनको पिता। सो जब त्रिपुरदास बरस बारह के भये तब उनकों संगहि राखतो। सगरो काम त्रिपुरदास कों सिखायो। सो राजा एक समय आगरे कों देसाधिपति के पास चल्यो। तब त्रिपुरदास को संग ले राजा के संग आगरे आयो। कछुक दिन आगरे में रहिकें राजा देसाधिपति सों बिदा होइकें देस कों चल्यो। सो श्रीगोवर्द्धन, श्रीगोवर्द्धनधर के दरसन कों आयो। तामें त्रिपुरदास पिता सहित आये। सो दिन तीन गोवर्द्धन में रहे। तब त्रिपुरदास को मन

त्रिपुरदास कायस्थ १५५

श्रीनाथजी के स्वरूप में आसक्त होय गयो। सो चोथे दिन राजा बिदा होई कें चलिवे की तैयारी करी। सो सुनकें त्रिपुरदास कों विरह ज्वर चढ़ि आयो। सो व्याकुल भये। तब पिता ने पूछी, त्रिपुरदास कैसे हैं ? तब त्रिपुरदास ने कही, मेरी देह छूटेगी, जो मोकों ले चलोगे। तातें केतो तुमहुं महिना दोय रहो, के राजा के संग जाउ, मैं पाछे तें आछे दरसन करिकें आऊंगो। तब मेरे प्रान रहें। तब त्रिपुरदास के पिता नें राजा सों सब समाचार कहें। या प्रकार मेरो बेटा कहत हैं। तब राजा ने कही, कहा चिंता है ? असवारी और मनुष्य राखि चलो। पाछें तें बेटा आय रहेगो। तब पितानें आय कही, बेटा ! तुम रहो इहां। चिंता मति करो। यह सुनत ही त्रिपुरदास कों आनंद भयो। ज्वर उतरि गयो। तब पिता प्रसन्न होइ पालकी मनुष्य दिये। जो–बेटा ! बेग अइयो। मैं वृद्ध भयो हों। राजा को काम काज करनो है। तब त्रिपुरदास कहें, तुम चलो मैं बेगो आऊंगो। तब पिता राजा के संग गयो। सो मारग में एक जमींदार सों लराई भई। तहां त्रिपुरदास के पिता कों गोली लगी। सो मरि गयो। राजा उह जमींदार कों मारिकें आगे चल्यो। पाछें उह राजा (ने) त्रिपुरदास पास मनुष्य पठायो। सो सब समाचार त्रिपुरदास सों उन (ने) कह्यो। सो सुनिकें त्रिपुरदास प्रसन्न भये। जो भली भई। अब मेरे कोंई बंधन तो है नाहीं। अब श्रीगोवर्द्धनधर के दरसन सदा करोंगो। पाछें पिता को कर्म मानसी गंगा पर सब किये। सुद्ध भये। सो नित्य सगरे दरसन करते। तब श्रीआचार्यजी एक दिन त्रिपुरदास सों कहें, जो–तू कौन है ? दोय महिना भये दरसन करते अपने घर जाउ। तब त्रिपुरदास ने कही, महाराज ! अब मैं कहाँ जाउं ? माता मरी जन्म तें, पिता अब मरयो, मेरो ब्याह भयो नाहीं। सो अब मेरो मन श्रीनाथजी के स्वरूप में अटक्यो है। सो मैं कहां जाउं ? तब श्रीआचार्यजी त्रिपुरदास की प्रीति देखिकें कहें, हम ऐसो करि देई तोकों, जहां रहें तहां श्रीनाथजी के दरसन करें। एक छिनको वियोग न होई। तब त्रिपुरदास ने दंडौत करिकें बिनती कियो, जो–महाराज ! मोकों यही चहिये। काहेतें, मोसों मांग्यो जाय नाहीं। नित्य खरच हू चहिये। और श्रीनाथजी के दरसन बिना मोसों रह्यो हू नाहीं जाय। सो यह चिंता हती। जो आपु कृपा करिकें जो आज्ञा करो सो मैं करूं। तब श्रीआचार्यजी त्रिपुरदास कों न्हवाइ के नाम निवेदन कराये। और श्रीनाथजी को चरणामृत महाप्रसाद दिये। सो नेत्रन के आगें श्रीनाथजी के स्वरूप को दरसन होन लाग्यो। तब श्रीआचार्यजी कहे, अब तुम इहां तें जाउ। जहां रहोगे तहां प्रभु तुमकों दरसन देइंगे। तू श्रीठाकुरजी कों कबहू पीठ न देइगो। तब त्रिपुरदास श्रीआचार्यजी कों दंडौत् करि, विदा होई चले। तब यह प्रन कियो जो श्रीनाथजी के चरणामृत महाप्रसाद लिये बिना जल न लेनो। यह मन में निश्चय करि घर में आये।

Image of Braj Bhasha text (Parīkh, *Caurāsī Vaiṣṇavan kī Vārtā* (2011), 154-155).

Example B (translation):

Now is told the bhāv of the vārtā of Purushottamdas and his wife, kṣatriya [*sevak*s] *who lived in Agra at Rajghat:*

***Bhāvprakāś*:** In *līlā* Purushottamdas is the *sakhī* of Shri Chandravali. Purushottamdas' name [in *līlā*] is Madhavi and his wife's name is Malati. The [worldly] homes of these two *kṣatriya*s were situated near to each other in Agra at Rajghat. It was into these homes that [Purushottamdas and his wife] were born. The two *kṣatriya* [families] were very friendly with one another. So the men [of both families] said: "It would be good if our son and daughter got married." So the two came together and the marriage took place. Within a year both fathers passed away. [Once] when Shri Acharyaji arrived in Agra, Purushottamdas and his wife [happened to be] sitting out in the garden. As soon as they caught sight of Shri Acharyaji, the [couple] said to each other: "We should take the refuge of [Shri Acharyaji]." So Purushottamdas jumped up and ran to Shri Acharyaji, prostrated himself and entreated him saying: "My Lord! Have mercy upon us and take us into

your refuge. Please come [and grace] my home."[15] Then Shri Acharyaji said: "Come to Adel and take the name [of Shri Krishna] from Shri Gusainji."[16] Then Purushottamdas said: "My Lord! What is the difference between you and Shri Gusainji? This being the case, you alone [should] make me your *sevak*. How can I have any faith that my body will carry on? Later on [such an] opportunity to take your *darśan* may not be easy to come by." In this way, since he was a *daivī jīv*, Purushottamdas had become aware that [Shri Acharyaji's] form was divine. Then Shri Acharyaji went to Purushottamdas' home. He had Purushottamdas and [Purushottamdas'] wife make a dedication to [Shri Krishna]. Then Purushottamdas and his wife entreated [Shri Acharyaji], saying: "My Lord! Now what is it that we should do?" Shri Acharyaji said: "Do the Lord's *sevā*." Then Purushottamdas said: "My Lord! Bestow Shri Thakurji upon me so that I may perform his *sevā*." Then Shri Acharyaji said: "A blemish will come upon your heads.[17] You should go to bathe in the Gangaji and then come to Adel where I will bestow Shri Thakurji upon you. You two both have these mothers who are *āsurī jīv*s ("wicked souls"). They will cause you trouble." Then Purushottamdas and his wife said: "But our mothers show a great deal of affection for us. So why would they cause any trouble?" Then Shri Acharyaji said: "They have shown you affection because until now you were not Vaishnavas. Just see what happens when they hear that you have become Vaishnavas. Therefore, I'm leaving quickly from here. I do not like to manage trouble." Then Purushottamdas and his wife fearfully put together whatever offering they could manage and quickly presented it to Shri Acharyaji. They bade farewell to Shri Acharyaji who, aware of the imminent trouble, immediately went to Adel. In the meantime Purushottamdas and his wife fearfully refrained from telling their mothers that they had become Vaishnavas for three days. They sustained themselves on plain milk.[18] Then Purushottamdas' mother saw the *mālā* around his neck and said: "Son, why is there a *mālā* around your neck? Our sacred thread is paramount. Why the *mālā*?" Purushottamdas did not reply. Then [the mother of Purushottamdas' wife] saw [her own daughter's] head and neck exposed. She cried when she saw the *mālā*, thinking: "Man and wife have both become ascetics!" Then the mother of Purushottamdas' wife said to Purushottamdas' mother: "Your son and my daughter have both taken to wearing the *mālā*—they have both become ascetics. What should we do?" Then the one said to the other: "Come on, let's remove those *mālā*s, otherwise both [our children] will [surely] die!" So both [mothers] came to

[15] This is a rather formulaic entreaty for initiation, which appears repeatedly in the *84VV* and *252VV*.

[16] Taking the *nām*, or "the name" refers to the first part of sectarian initiation when the new devotee recites a *mantra* stating that he or she takes refuge in Lord Krishna. See Chapter One for further details about the process of initiation.

[17] The Braj Bhasha reads: *tumhāre māthe kalaṅk āvego—kalaṅk*, meaning "spot" or "blemish."

[18] The implication of this statement is that because Purushottamdas and his wife had become Vaishnavas they had therefore committed to only eating certain kinds of foods prepared in certain kinds of ways. Because of this, they could not accept the food their uninitiated mothers would have presumably prepared for the household.

the husband and wife and exclaimed: "Remove these *mālā*s this very moment! If you don't, then you both will destroy yourselves!" (*nahīṃ to doūn kī hatyā leūge*). Then Purushottamdas summoned ten to twenty of his relations and addressed the mothers in front of everyone: "These *mālā*s are part and parcel of who we are. We wouldn't care if our heads fall off, but we will never part with these *mālā*s. What [harm] are the *mālā*s to you? If you desire, you can [continue to] live with us, or, if you [prefer] you will be given a separate house and a man will stay [there] with you as your servant. Take whatever you like. If it is possible for us, then we will serve you. If you want, you can stay in this house and we will go to live in a separate home. We will do as you say, [just] don't cause any problems: we will absolutely not abandon our *mālā*s. And we won't take food or drink touched by your hands. If you take *mālā*s yourselves and become Vaishnavas then water from your hands will be acceptable to us." Hearing this, both mothers became angry: "You both have become ascetics and are now making us into ascetics too? We nurtured you and in your view we are nothing but [lowly] *camār*s and *bhaṅgī*s, thinking: 'We won't even take their water!' We'll both die on account of you two."[19] In this way, for five days nobody took water. All their relatives and even the leader of the village came to resolve the issue, but the two [mothers] would not listen. That night, while Purushottamdas and his wife were sleeping, the two mothers went to the household well, jumped into it and died. In the morning Purushottamdas performed their last rites. Then everyone in the community began to say: "Since you, man and wife, have destroyed [your mothers], go bathe in Gangaji. Then [you may] return to our community." Then man and wife thought: "We must go to Shri Acharyaji and have him establish the Lord's *sevā* for us. Let's go." Then they both left from [their hometown] and came to Prayag. After bathing, they came to Adel, prostrated themselves to Shri Acharyaji and Shri Gusainji, and told them everything: "My Lord! Everything happened just as you said it would. Both our mothers died and all of our afflictions have been extinguished. Now bestow upon us the Lord's *sevā*. Then Shri Acharyaji said: "Those two were *āsurī jīv*s, but now that you have become Vaishnavas they too will be sheltered [by the Lord] (*gati hoigī*). If one person becomes a Vaishnava, then their entire family becomes spiritually accomplished (*kṛthārth hoygo*). Now go do the Lord's *sevā*. In Adel there lived an old Brahmin who followed the path of *pūjā* (*pūjāmārgīy*) and who had a small Krishna *svarūp*. Shri Acharyaji told [this Brahmin] that: "If you can no longer perform *pūjā* for Shri Thakurji then give him to me." Then that Brahmin said: "I was just thinking about who I could give him to now that I can no longer perform *pūjā*." Then Shri Acharyaji bathed Shri Thakurji in the five holy substances and bestowed Him upon Purushottamdas. [Purushottamdas] stayed in Adel for a few days and after learning all the ways in which to perform *sevā* [from Shri Acharyaji], returned to Agra. All members of the community prepared meals for Brahmins in their kitchens in order to dispel all worldly disputes and Purushottamdas and his wife began to perform the Lord's *sevā*.[20]

[19] *camār*s and *bhaṅgī*s refer to two lower-caste communities—leather workers and sweepers.

[20] The comparison between *pūjā* and *sevā* is intended to further distinguish those who follow the *bhaktimārg* (or the *puṣṭimārg*) from those who do not.

***Prasaṅg* 1:** One day Shri Gusainji came to Agra. When he came to Purushottamdas' home, Purushottamdas' wife was sequestered. Shri Gusainji asked Purushottamdas: "Where is your wife?" Purushottamdas said: "My Lord! The *janeu* ("sacred thread") must have broken." Then Shri Gusainji realized that she was must be sitting separately. [Because of this,] Shri Gusainji bathed and [himself] prepared everything [for Thakurji's meal]: lentils, rice, five or six vegetables, and sweet rice pudding. When it was time to roll the bread (*roṭī*), Purushottamdas' wife, who had just bathed, came to sit down. Then Shri Gusainji asked: "Where were you until now?" Then she said: "My Lord! I had some work to do."

> ***Bhāvprakāś*:** At this time [Purushottamdas' wife's] fifth day of confinement had passed. She had remained hidden thinking: "I should not show my face to Shri Gusainji until I have bathed."[21]

Then she finished rolling the *roṭī*. Shri Gusainji [had also] completed all the [other] food preparations [and thus] set out Shri Thakurji's meal. When [Thakurji had] completed the meal, [Shri Gusainji] prepared Shri Thakurji for rest (*anosar*).

Then the couple said to Shri Gusainji: "My Lord! Take your meal on this very plate [that Shri Thakurji has eaten from]." Then Shri Gusainji said: "How can one take a meal on the plate of Shri Thakurji? I'll take my [own] meal on a leaf plate." Then Purushottamdas said: "My Lord! It's not as if our wealth has decreased or that all the coppersmiths have died. New utensils will come our way!" Reasoning in this way, [Purushottamdas] served the meal to Shri Gusainji on Shri Thakurji's plate.

> ***Bhāvprakāś*:** From this it is [known] that they had devotional sentiments for Shri Gusainji. Furthermore, in *līlā* Shri Chandravaliji takes her [own] meal with Shri Thakurji from the very same plate. [The divine form of Purushottamdas] was the *sakhī* of Shri Chandravaliji [who is the divine form of Gusainji]. All of the refulgence of *līlā* shines through (*sphūrti*).[22] Therefore, Purushottamdas served Shri Gusainji his meal on Shri Thakurji's plate. The man and wife had great affection for Shri Gusainji, which is why they thought: "If we bring the dish over again on a different plate, then the food will lose its taste and get cold. The delay in preparing the food is also not good." Thus, with great affection they served [Gusainji] the meal on the same plate.

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[21] This is in reference to the traditional observances surrounding menstruation when women do not perform ritual duties etc. Contemporary women in the *puṣṭimārgīy* community continue to observe such measures. Many of the women with whom I spoke told me that they would return to performing *sevā* on the fourth day of their monthly cycle.

[22] The "shining through" refers to the luminescence of *līlā* suddenly becoming apparent in the worldly context. That is, the parallel reality of the divine world is causally linked to and ever present in the *laukik* context.

Then Shri Gusainji ate his meal and sat down. Then Purushottamdas' wife came to sit down nearby and said: "My Lord! Eat this food." Then Shri Gusainji said: "I'll eat as much as I like." Then Purushottamdas' wife said: "My Lord! Would that you eat in all Vaishnavas' homes just as you eat in the home of Nandaji, [Lord Krishna's adopted father]."[23]

> ***Bhāvprakāś*:** From this it is understood that: "in Nandaji's house you eat in accordance with the desires of the devotees." To this [Gusainji] said: "I'll take as much as I desire. Will this do?"

In this way, [Purushottamdas and his wife] spoke affectionately with Shri Gusainji. They served him [further helpings of the] food and Shri Gusainji was pleased. Then the couple had Shri Gusainji sleep on Shri Thakurji's bed—right there on his holy bedding and pillow—and began to worship [Shri Gusainji's] feet. Then Shri Gusainji said: "Now get up, you two, and go take *mahāprasād* [for yourselves]. Then the couple said: "My Lord! We will always take *mahāprasād*." In this way, for five to seven days they had Shri Gusainji stay with them—constantly serving him fresh things with love and firm resolve. Always new leaf plates, bed, clothing etc. were presented. Such a husband and wife are blessed devotees.

> ***Bhāvprakāś*:** In this *vārtā* the following principle was established: they have more love for the *guru* than there is [even] for Shri Thakurji. If Vaishnavas act in such a way then they will reap the fruits of their deeds.

[23] The point being made here is that Purushottamdas and his wife, as hosts, wish for Krishna to eat fulsomely—just as he would in Nanda's home (that is, in his own father's home) in Braj. In this context, as throughout the *vārtā*s, the *guru* (here Gusainji) is being compared to Krishna himself.

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